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Old Stealthy, THE GOVERNMENT DETECTIVE

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OLD STEALTHY, THE GOVERNMENT DETECTIVE

By POLICE CAPTAN HOWARD.

CHAPTER I.

THE NEW COUNTERFEIT.

"WELL?"

The speaker was one of the chiefs of the secret service at Washington. He asked the question in a sharp, imperative tone, as he looked up from the newspaper he was reading, and which happened to contain a cutting article relative to himself.

The person addressed, an officer who had entered the room, answered:

"A messenger from the Treasury wishes to see you at once."

"Admit him," the chief said, not yet very amiably, and in a few moments more a middle-aged man entered the office.

As he saw and recognized him the chief's manner at once became cordial, and he invited the visitor to be seated.

"I had no idea it was you," he said. "It must be something of importance to cause you to come in person."

"It is," the visitor, who was one of the chief clerks in the Treasury department, answered. "We have just received a new counterfeit for redemption."

"Indeed! Of what denomination?"

"Five dollars."

"On what bank?"

"The First National of Milwaukee."

"Is it a good imitation?"

"Not very. Here it is."

As the visitor spoke, he drew the counterfeit note from his pocket-book, and gave it into the other's hand.

"No, it is not very well executed," the chief said, as he examined it, "but sufficiently so to be dangerous. I must put a man on the case at once."

"Very well," the visitor said, rising, "I will leave it with you."

"Do so. By the way, from whom did you receive it?"

"From the Central National Bank of New York."

"To-day?"

"Yes."

"Depend upon it, I will not allow the case to be lost sight of."

"Very well," the Treasury official replied, and exchanging a few civil words with the chief, took his leave.

When he had left the apartment, the chief touched the bell upon the desk before him.

The officer answered the summons.

"What men have we on hand?" his superior asked.

The officer named half a dozen or more, none of which seemed to give the chief satisfaction.

"They are all young and inexperienced," he said. "Who is Danforth?"

"He is detailed upon that custom house affair."

"True. And young Loveland?"

"He has not yet reported on that diamond robbery."

The chief considered a few moments.

"I suppose I will have to try one of the men you have named," he said at length. "Send Williams here."

During this short conversation, the officer had stood near the desk, his back to the door, which was also partly concealed from the view of the chief by the front of his desk; now the officer turned to obey his superior's commands, an exclamation of surprise left his lips.

While they had been speaking, a third person had entered the apartment and seated himself in a chair near the door.

The intruder was a seemingly old man with gray hair worn rather long upon his shoulders, and whiskers and heavy beard of the same hue, concealing the lower part of his face. His attire was old-fashioned in cut, and rather the worse for wear as was also his hat, which was surrounded by a rusty mourning band. A pair of heavily rimmed spectacles shaded his eyes, and in his hand he carried an umbrella that was evidently a relic of his youth.

His face wore a benign expression, and his self-composure did not seem to be in the least disturbed by the officer's voluntary exclamation.

It drew the attention of the chief to the cause, however, who uttered an expression of surprise.

"Old Stealthy!" he exclaimed.

"The same," the visitor admitted.

"I am glad to see you," the chief said. "I began to be afraid you had got into trouble."

"So I did; but I managed to get out of it again."

"Have you got on to the trail yet?"

"Not yet. I begin to suspect the thieves, whoever they are, have left the country."

"Do you give the case up, then?"

"No, not for good; but I think the only way of getting to their tracks is to let the affair rest where it is for awhile. Sooner or later some clew will turn up to lead us on the right track."

While these words had been passing the officer had left the room; the chief now recalled him.

"You need not tell Williams," he said.

Again the officer left the apartment, and the chief turned to Old Stealthy.

"I agree with you," he said, "about allowing that other affair to rest for the present, or, at any rate, seem to rest. I will put some one else on it, and if they happen to stumble on any clew will give it to you to work up. You can also keep an eye open for anything that seems to have any connection with it."

"Decidedly," Old Stealthy said, with emphasis. "I have never yet given up a case altogether until I brought it to a successful conclusion."

"No," the chief answered, "you are one of the few in the service who can say you have never yet failed in any case you have undertaken, and I only remove you from this temporarily until you have another worked up."

"Ah," Old Stealthy said; "what is it?"

"A new counterfeit five-dollar bill."

"Where did it come from?"

"New York."

"Have you got it?"

"Yes. Here it is."

As the chief spoke he placed the counterfeit bill the Treasury clerk had given him in the detective's hands.

For a few moments Old Stealthy examined it in silence, and then he said:

"It is not very well executed, yet I have no doubt they will be able to shove a good many of them unless they are stopped in time. You know nothing further than it was sent on here for redemption?"

"That is all."

"It is not much for a starter, but I daresay I will be able to make something out of it in time."

"As soon as you learn anything you will report."

"Certainly," Old Stealthy answered, and after a few more words he took his departure, in the same noiseless way he had come, while the chief resumed his perusal of the editorial attack upon himself.

"What a mysterious fellow that Old Stealthy is," he mused as he did so. "The name is certainly an appropriate one, and it is lucky he turned up just when he did. If we failed to trace this new counterfeit, the papers, like this one, would make capital out of it; and if it can be traced at all, Old Stealthy is the man of all others to do it."

CHAPTER II.

AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

THE chief had spoken truly when he thus expressed his thoughts concerning Old Stealthy.

He had a reputation for shrewdness and ability that extended even beyond the limits of the secret service, and his name was a terror to all who had occasion to fear the law.

What his real name was, none but his superiors on the force and one or two intimate friends were aware; his age was likewise a problem few could solve; as Old Stealthy alone he was known, and by the criminal class hated and feared.

As the chief had said, he was the best man that could have been found to trace the counterfeiters, and though the case seemed a comparatively trifling one, when taken in connection with the attacks made by the organs of the opposite po-

litical party upon the management of the secret service, it assumed a more important aspect.

The other case upon which the detective had been working was the robbery of a number of government bonds and a case of jewels valued at over a hundred thousand dollars.

They were the property of a wealthy Brazilian, and the manner in which the robbery had been planned and carried out showed both ingenuity and daring on the part of the thieves.

That they were intimate with the habits and business of Don Rodrigo, for such was the Brazilian's name, was evident.

He was engaged in large speculations, some of which threatened to turn out disastrously, and his presence in Washington had been for the purpose of trying to get a bill passed that would protect the interests which were in jeopardy.

He was accompanied by his wife, a very handsome lady, of American birth; it was also the intention of her husband, should he succeed in getting the bills passed, to become a naturalized citizen.

Both the bonds and the jewels he placed in his wife's care, to be within reach should he need them at any moment. They had agreed, however, that unless he demanded them in person she should deliver to no one unless they brought as a guarantee a very curious antique ring the don always wore.

Several days passed and the don began to think the crisis he had dreaded was past, and he communicated this fact to his wife; he, however, told her to still retain the bonds and jewels for a few days longer, and should any messenger bearing his ring come for them to hand them over at once.

That same afternoon a messenger did arrive.

He brought a short note written in Spanish, and seemingly in the don's handwriting, requesting the valuables. The messenger also showed the ring as guarantee, and without any hesitation the Senora Rodrigo handed them over, and, knowing her husband's superstitious fancy regarding the ring, which had been an heirloom for generations, inclosed it in the package.

It was then about dusk, and at midnight the don was brought home to the hotel in an almost unconscious condition.

He had been found about an hour before by the officer of the beat, lying insensible on a side street, and bleeding profusely from a severe cut on the head.

All his jewelry and money were gone, but on being taken to the station house a card was found in one of his pockets, and after his wound had been dressed he was sent in a carriage to the hotel.

It was supposed he had been the victim of the murderous assault on account of the diamonds he wore, but upon recovering sufficiently he told another story.

That afternoon he had received a message purporting to be from one of the senators whom he hoped to interest in the passing of the bill, asking him to meet him at a certain hotel.

A carriage was waiting at the door, and without a touch of suspicion, Don Rodrigo entered it. As he did so, he was surprised to find it already had two occupants.

The man who had brought the message and who had represented himself as the senator's secretary, also entered and introduced the other two men as representatives from one of the Western States.

The Brazilian was delighted to meet them, and they began to talk, he watching his opportunity to speak of the proposed bill, when suddenly the curtains of the windows were drawn down.

The next moment he found himself grasped by the throat and the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his forehead.

"Utter a word," one of the men said, "and I will send a bullet through your brain."

Even while the words were uttered a large sponge saturated with chloroform was pressed over his mouth and nostrils.

In vain he attempted to free himself; the deadly opiate soon did its work and he lost all consciousness.

How long he remained insensible he did not know, but when he again began to revive, he was in a carriage.

For some time he could not recall how he came to be there, but as recollection began to return, he attempted to rise to his feet and utter a cry for help.

Before the appeal could leave his lips, however, he was struck a heavy blow on the head with the butt of a revolver, again depriving him of consciousness.

Such was the story he told, and there was no reason to doubt its truth: the nefarious scheme had been carefully planned and successfully carried out.

That the ruffians who had kidnapped him were the same as those who had received the jewels and bonds from his wife, was proved by the fact, that at the time he entered the carriage he had on his finger the ring which was to be the token to his wife that the message sent was genuine.

The handwriting of the note was so nearly like that of the don, that it would have puzzled any person but an expert to detect the difference.

Evidently the villains were no novices in their business, and the next day came a fresh proof of their sharpness.

The description of the jewels and the numbers of the bonds had not been advertised an hour when a well-known Hebrew private bill discounter and collateral banker entered the chief's office in great tribulation.

His story was soon told.

He had been called upon the previous night by a person representing himself to be a senator from the West, who required an immediate advance of fifty thousand dollars in cash.

The banker was startled at the amount of the loan required, yet he had frequent calls for unexpectedly large amounts of money at unexpected hours. He also had more than that amount in the vault beneath his residence, which was also his place of business, and instead of showing his surprise, he merely asked what security was offered.

The reply was government bonds for an amount several thousand dollars larger than the loan required, and after some negotiation the bargain was made and the money handed over.

Inquiries elicited the fact that the senator, whose name had been assumed, was at the time in his seat in the House; and hardly had the victimized Hebrew taken his departure, than another arrived.

This was also a gentleman of the Hebrew race. He was a diamond dealer, and at about the same hour that the bogus senator had called upon the broker, a lady had also paid him a visit.

She came in a private carriage and was elegantly dressed, yet it was evident she was in deep distress.

She explained that her husband was a trusted Treasury official and had gambled some of the money with which he had been intrusted. Exposure was imminent, and unless he could replace the money before business hours in the morning, he would be ruined.

The amount needed was sixty thousand dollars, and as se-

curity she would pledge her diamonds, worth double that sum. As she made this proposal she took a case from her pocket and opening it gave it into his hands.

The practiced eye of the dealer at once saw that the jewels were worth nearly double the amount she had named, and as she also intrusted him with a commission to have duplicate made in paste, his suspicions were also removed, and he paid her over the money.

His feeling at having been victimized may be better imagined than described, but all his ravings could not alter the fact.

The thieves certainly were no fools.

They had lost, it was true, nearly fifty thousand dollars of the actual worth of their spoils, but they had got over a hundred thousand in clear cash, and defeated any chance of their identity being traced by means of the stolen property.

The most efficient detectives were put upon the case, but it was only to be forced to acknowledge themselves beaten. It was not until the affair was a week old that Old Stealthy arrived from the West, where he had successfully worked up an important case, and it was placed in his hands.

Had he been on hand at the time he might have done something with it, but after the period that had elapsed, as has been seen, he also had to admit himself at fault.

That he would yet hunt down the criminals, he was determined, but he saw plainly that it was a question of time, and chance alone could give him the necessary clew.

He intended to aid chance as much as possible, and to do so there was no way so likely to be successful as to have another case to work up.

He had often found that one case helped another in the most unexpected ways, and he therefore set himself to work upon that of the new counterfeit with the determination that before he was through one or the other should no longer be a mystery.

He had a way of working peculiar to himself. It was this method that had given him the name of Old Stealthy. He would appear at the most unexpected moments, always looking the same, and disappear in the same mysterious way. His boots always looked heavy and ill-made, yet his footfalls were light and noiseless as those of a cat.

After leaving the chief's office he made a circuit of a dozen or more blocks, looking around him with an air as if he were an utter stranger in the locality.

At last he reached a quiet looking private dwelling-house, and taking a latch-key from his pocket placed it in the lock and admitted himself.

During the remainder of the day several people came and went in and out of the house, but none of them in any way resembled the detective.

It was beginning to grow dusk when he again made his appearance and stood on the stoop for a few moments looking around him as if uncertain which direction to take.

At last he appeared to make up his mind, and bent his steps toward one of the principal hotels.

He wore the same clothes as when he had entered the house; the only difference in his get-up was that he now carried a grip-sack as well as an umbrella, yet there was only a general resemblance to the man who had been in the chief's office.

At first glance one would have said he was the same; a second and a third would have convinced him he was mistaken.

The cause of this change was undefinable; whether it was the walk or what, it was certain it was there.

In his own mysterious way he had been busy during the afternoon, and already he fancied he had struck a clew.

Reaching the hotel he advanced to the desk and registered himself as "Daniel J. Hoskins, of Hoskinsville, Ohio."

"I came up here looking for my son," he explained to the clerk. "He's been here some time looking for a government office. I haven't heard of him since he left, and want to make sure he hasn't come to any harm. I may put up here a few days, and if you want the pay in advance I've got it here."

The clerk assured him there was no necessity, and allotting him a room, called a boy to show him up to it.

When the boy had deposited the grip-sack in the room, he dismissed him and remained in the chamber about a quarter of an hour before he again came down into the office.

As he did so, a carriage drew up at the ladies' entrance, and a fashionably dressed lady alighted and entered the hotel.

Asking for Miss Ashmore, she was shown to an elegantly furnished sitting-room on the first floor in which a lady was seated.

The visitor was closely veiled, but as the door was closed she raised the veil showing a face of remarkable beauty.

"So you have arrived, Clarisse?" the lady seated in the apartment said.

"Yes," was the reply, "I could not come sooner. I had much to do."

"Is everything favorable?" the lady who styled herself Miss Ashmore asked anxiously.

"No, Celeste," the visitor answered; "one of the ventures is a failure."

"Which?"

"The five."

"That is impossible."

"Impossible?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because none have been circulated in this section."

"But they have in New York."

"Yes, and——"

"One has been sent to the Treasury for redemption."

"That is bad."

"Yes. I always said it was not fit to be circulated."

"That is true. Still, they are good for the Canadian market."

"But even there they will have to be shoved quickly."

"Yes, it must be at once. To-morrow we will go to New York."

"Why to-morrow?"

"Because I have much to do to-night. You have heard of Old Stealthy?"

"Yes."

"He has been put upon the case."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

Instead of continuing the conversation, the woman who was known as Miss Ashmore, and the visitor had called Celeste, sprung to her feet, while her jeweled hand sought the bosom of her dress.

Her eyes were directed towards the door and flashed a fierce light. Following their direction, the visitor also made a step backwards, an expression of mingled astonishment and fear escaping her lips.

During their conversation the door had been opened noiselessly, and now, standing on the threshold, both saw the figure of Old Stealthy.

CHAPTER III.

HURLED TO DOOM.

WHEN she had first seen the detective standing in the doorway Celeste's hand sought her bosom.

The next moment it was withdrawn and an elegantly-mounted revolver leveled at the detective's heart.

As he saw the weapon a well-simulated cry of fear left Old Stealthy's lips.

"Hold on there, miss!" he cried. "Don't you go and shoot, for the Lord's sake! I only came in here looking for my son. I heard he was in the hotel somewhere, and so you must excuse me."

As the detective made this explanation the woman lowered the weapon.

With a rapid glance, to her companion she said:

"You are a stranger, then, in the city?"

"Yes," Old Stealthy answered. "I only came here from Hoskinsville to-day."

"From Hoskinsville?"

"Yes."

"Where may that be?"

"In the State of Ohio."

"Ohio?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you are looking after the chances of the next Presidential election?"

A smile accompanied the question, and the revolver was replaced in the folds of her dress.

"No," Old Stealthy answered, simply; "I only came here to look after a son of mine. He's been here quite awhile trying to get a government office, but I guess he hasn't succeeded very well. Leastwise I haven't heard of him since he came."

Again Celeste shot a rapid glance at her companion.

"Perhaps I may be able to assist you in your search," she said. "Won't you come in and sit down?"

"I don't care if I do," Old Stealthy answered; and closing the door, he advanced into the room and seated himself.

"Do you know what department he wished to be appointed to?" Celeste asked as he did so.

"I guess he wasn't much particular anyhow," was the reply, "but he'd take anything that turned up."

"And you have not heard of him since he came here?"

"No."

"It may be difficult to trace him then."

"I'm afraid it may be, but I'm bound to find him before I get through."

"I admire your determination. But, tell me, did he know any person in the city?"

"Not that I know of, except our member, and him he'd only seen a few times."

"That is bad for his chances of appointment I am afraid. Did he have much money with him?"

"Well I guess he had nearly a thousand dollars. He taught school for several years, and I guess he saved some, though he was a little wild. Then I started him off with five hundred, and his uncle gave him a hundred more."

"Ah!" Celeste said, shaking her head, "you say he was a little wild?"

"He was."

"Then perhaps he may have gone to enjoy himself, and lost all his money, and was ashamed to apply to you for any more."

"That is what I am afraid of, and that's the reason I came on here myself. If he's got into any trouble I'll take him out if it costs all I'm worth, and I guess they wouldn't have called our town after my brother if there wasn't some money in the family."

"It is hardly probable."

"No, and every cent of it was made by good, square, honest work. I'll give the young puppy a lecture, I can tell you, when I find him, but he's not going to suffer while me or my brother Jim has a cent."

"Of course you could not think of such a thing, and believe me, I sympathize with you, for I have a brother who is the greatest scamp living, and yet we all love him more than the others who are all that could be wished. And now I think I can still be of assistance to you in helping to find your prodigal."

"Do you?" Old Stealthy asked eagerly.

"Yes, I have a cousin who is a clerk in one of the government offices. He is a little fast you know, but that is all. He is the best natured fellow ever lived, and I know he would be pleased to help you."

"If he would, I wouldn't mind what it cost."

"Do not mention anything of that kind. My cousin is very touchy on that point, and if you were to speak of payment he would be seriously offended."

"What is your cousin's name?"

"Hilton, Harry Hilton."

"Where could I see him?"

"I will send for him here and introduce him to you. You are staying at the hotel, are you not?"

"Yes."

"I will send him a note to-night, and he will probably call to-morrow."

"How can I thank you?"

"Do not mention it. I am pleased when I can do a kindness to any one."

Old Stealthy rose to take his leave.

As he did so, a knock came on the door.

"Come in," Miss Ashmore said.

A servant entered with a card.

Miss Ashmore took it.

"Show him up," she said.

The servant left the room, and turning to Old Stealthy, Miss Ashmore added:

"This is indeed fortunate."

"What?"

"Do you know who my visitor is?"

"No."

"Can you guess?"

"Your cousin?"

"Yes."

As she answered this, a young man, dressed in the height of fashion, entered.

Old Stealthy recognized him at once as a notorious confidence man and steerer for one of the most high-toned gambling saloons in the city.

As may well be supposed, however, he did not make his knowledge known.

Instead, after an introduction he proceeded to explain the object of his visit, in his assumed character.

Hilton listened attentively; when the disguised detective had finished his story, he said:

"I think I can tell you where to find your son. But you must pardon me now for I have some rather unpleasant news to tell my cousin."

Old Stealthy took the hint and left the room. Before he could descend the staircase, however, the door was again opened, and Miss Ashmore called him back.

The lady's appearance and manner had changed completely in a few moments.

She appeared now stricken with the deepest grief, and her eyes were full of tears.

In a voice broken by sobs she said:

"My cousin has brought me bad news. A married sister of mine who lives in Baltimore is very sick, and with my friend I must start at once to see her. Harry, however, will remain behind, and he has promised to do all he can to assist you."

As she was speaking her cousin also put in an appearance.

"I will have to go and see these ladies off," he said, "and after that I am at your service. Where can I meet you at ten o'clock?"

"I am staying here," Old Stealthy answered, "but to-morrow morning——"

"Don't consider any trouble on my part a moment," Hilton interrupted, hastily. "I am entirely at your service, and if we ever are able to find your son it will be in some of his night haunts."

"Ah!" Old Stealthy said; "has the boy got so bad as that?"

Hilton made no reply but to shake his head sorrowfully, and after a few more words they parted, Old Stealthy promising to meet him at ten the same night in the hotel reading-room.

The promise was apparently most gratefully given, but it was far from the detective's intention to keep the appointment.

He well knew the cause of Hilton's eagerness to assist him in his fictitious search.

It was to rope him into some game where the supposed countryman would be skinned of every cent he possessed.

But Old Stealthy was not getting roped in—not that night at any rate.

He had other work to do, and that was to watch the two ladies who had taken such a deep and tender interest in his search for his son.

That their departure from the city was not fiction, he felt pretty certain, but that Baltimore was their destination he strongly doubted.

Descending to the reading-room, he took up a paper and appeared to be deeply interested in its contents.

A quarter of an hour or more passed, and then Hilton left the hotel.

Going to the clerk's desk, Old Stealthy explained he was going to pay a visit to a friend whose address he had just discovered, and might not return for two or three days, so he would pay for the room in advance.

He also told the clerk if any person inquired for him at ten that night, to inform him he had found traces of his son, but would meet him at the hotel two days from then.

Five minutes later he had left the hotel, his grip-sack in his hand.

Entering one of the hacks, he gave the driver the destination to which he wanted to be taken, and the carriage rolled away.

Another five minutes or so, and he called to the driver to stop.

"I have changed my mind," he said, "and will get out here, but I shall pay you your fare just the same as if you had driven me where I told you to."

To this arrangement the driver made no objection, and paying him the money Old Stealthy walked away.

During the few moments he had been in the hack he had made a wonderful change in his appearance, however; though he was still an old man, he was by no means the same who had entered the carriage.

The driver scratched his head reflectively, trying to make it out, but it being past his comprehension he put it out of his mind and returned to the hotel to await another fare.

He had scarcely reached it than the detective was also there.

By this time it had grown dark, and he was able to watch the ladies' entrance without standing much risk of being suspected.

A short time passed when a waiter came out and hailed one of the hackmen; a moment or two more and the porters lifted a Saratoga up to the driver's seat; then two ladies closely veiled came out of the hotel and entered the vehicle.

"Baltimore and Ohio depot," one of them said, and the next moment they had driven off.

A minute did not elapse before Old Stealthy was in another carriage having the same destination.

Reaching the depot he soon found out that the ladies were the two with whom he had held the conversation in the room in the hotel, and also discovered that the trunk was checked for New York.

Buying a ticket for the same city, he saw the ladies seat themselves, and entered the same car.

He saw that they were both attired in modest traveling costumes, and were most lady-like in their behavior.

As the conductor passed to take the tickets he saw that those of both were for New York, but without a sleeper, and a quiet smile of satisfaction flitted over his face as he meditated he was on the right track.

When the train reached Philadelphia it was considerably behind time; a number of passengers came on board and the train was crowded.

Resigning his seat to a lady the detective was about to go forward to the smoking car, when he saw a rough looking fellow pass through the car.

As he went past the seat in which Celeste and her companion were seated, he made a rapid and almost imperceptible signal.

Reaching the smoking-car he engaged in conversation for half an hour or more with another flashily-dressed but equally impulsive looking ruffian, and then both rose and went toward the rear of the train.

Remembering the signal he had seen, after a few moments the detective rose and followed them.

The train was running at full speed.

The night was a dark one, and with heavy wind and a coldizzling rain.

Utterly unsuspecting of any danger Old Stealthy stepped on the platform and closed the door of the car.

Hardly had he done so than he received a heavy blow upon the back of his head.

The blow was not quite stunning in its force, and instinctively he clutched at the railing to save himself from falling.

Before he could do so, however, the train swept around a curve, lifting him from his feet and hurling him to doom.

CHAPTER IV.

A DOUBLE IDENTITY.

As the detective fell two men on either platform turned and entered opposite cars.

They were the two ruffians whom he had followed to the platform.

By some means they had become aware of Old Stealthy's identity, and laid a trap for him.

As has been seen he walked straight into it—walked to his doom.

During the rest of the journey they did not speak to each other.

As one of them passed where the two women were seated, however, he made a signal.

It signified that their murderous work was accomplished.

The ruffians were in league with the women, and the fact of the detective being on the train had been telegraphed in cipher from Washington.

How such a thing was possible the reader will be able to see as our story progresses.

When at length the train reached the Grand Central Depot one of the ruffians managed to place himself directly behind the two women as they passed out of the car.

As he did so Celeste slipped a note into his hand.

On it was written:

"Send Jason to me at the Grand Central as soon as possible."

As they passed out of the depot the two assassins again met.

"Any word?" one of them asked.

"Yes," the one to whom the paper had been given replied.

"What is it?"

"Don't know yet."

"Then let us go and have a wet, and see."

Together they proceeded to an adjacent saloon.

As they seated themselves at one of the tables and called for their drinks they opened the slip of paper, and read the words written upon it.

"I suppose you will go at once?" the ruffian who had inquired if there was any word asked.

"Yes, immediately," was the reply. "You may depend it is something important."

"You bet, or the countess and Clarisse wouldn't be here together."

"Well, let us have another drink, and then we'll separate. Where will I see you when I come back?"

"At Benicia Ben's. Say, strike him for some coin. We ought to have something handsome for last night's job."

"You bet we will, or I'll know the reason why. His life was worth ten thousand dollars."

"We did it easy enough, too."

"Yes, but it was accident more than anything else. He was an old man, but he was as strong as a giant, and quick as a flash with a revolver or a knife. Your blow didn't knock him out of time, and if it hadn't been for the curve, he might have dropped the both of us."

"Well, he's done for now, that's certain. I wonder will the body be recognized."

"Probably it will, by the shield, but they can't begin to put it onto us."

"They'll raise a fuss about it."

"Of course, but it will blow over. Now, I must see Jason, and after I get through, I'll see you at Benicia Ben's."

Draining their glasses, the ruffians left the saloon and separated. Hailing a hack, the one to whom Celeste had given the paper was driven down town, to a third rate hotel in the vicinity of Eighth street and the East River.

It was patronized chiefly by the more respectable class of sea-faring men, or people in some way connected with the docks; at that hour there were but few people about.

Advancing to the clerk's desk, the ruffian asked:—

"Is Jason around?"

"Why, hello, Bill, is that you?" the clerk said, as he recognized the visitor.

"My own noble self."

"Where do you come from?"

"Philadelphia."

"Business trip, I suppose?"

"Yes, and big business too."

"What's the lay?"

"Mum's the word at present," was the reply, accompanied by a wink. "I want to see Jason just now."

The clerk turned, and placing his mouth to a speaking-tube, whistled for an answer.

"Do you see any one?" the clerk asked, as the answer was returned.

"Who is it?"

"Blackwell Bill."

"All right. I'll see him."

As the man at the other end of the tube gave this reply, the clerk came from behind the desk, and telling the visitor to follow him, led the way along the hall and up the staircase until a room on the first floor was reached.

Giving three peculiar taps upon the door, it was opened, and they entered a large, old-fashioned paneled room.

As the visitors entered a man greeted them.

He was large, almost gigantic, in stature, with a lion-like face, around which a perfect main of tawny hair flowed almost to his shoulders.

His face did not strike one as being evil, but no one could be blind to its expression of power. The forehead was massive, the eyes steely gray, clear and piercing, while the long mustache and flowing beard could not conceal the firm expression of the lips and heavy jaws.

Such was Jason, one of the most remarkable characters in the criminal annals of the past twenty years.

He was of great possible virtues, combined with an intellect that might have raised him to any position, however exalted, had he chosen to exert it in that direction; instead, he chose to debase it, and only succeeded in becoming a notorious criminal.

As the hotel clerk saw him he stepped back into the hall, leaving him and Blackwell Bill alone.

"Well?" Jason asked, when he had closed the door.

"I bring a message from the countess."

"The countess?"

"Yes."

"Is she in the city?"

"Yes."

"When did she come?"

"Last night. Clarisse came with her. Old Stealthy shadowed them."

"Old Stealthy! The devil!"

"Yes, but there's nothing more to fear from him now."

"What do you mean?"

"He's dead."

"Dead!"

"Yes."

"How?"

"My pal Knuckle Ned and me laid him out."

The ruffian then went on to explain the manner in which they had murdered the detective; and after Jason had congratulated him and he had received the money he had asked for he took his leave, first naming Benicia Ben's saloon as a place where his whereabouts could be learned at any time.

When he had left the room Jason closed the door, carefully locking and bolting it; then he crossed the floor and pressed his finger upon the molding of one of the panels.

Instantly it slid aside, revealing an aperture large enough for a man to pass through, and doing so he stood in a narrow corridor.

Closing the panel again he shot the bolt that secured the panel, and took a small lamp from a bracket on the wall and walked along the narrow passage until a door checked his further progress.

Opening it, a narrow, spiral staircase was revealed, and descending it another door was reached.

This also was opened and closed and Jason went for thirty or forty yards along another narrow passage, then another door, another spiral stairway, and again a landing.

Pressing upon a spring in the wall a panel flew aside, giving entrance to a large apartment in which a brilliant light was burning.

The room was a strange one, it was evidently a laboratory, for there were retorts and other scientific apparatus, while occupying nearly one whole side of the apartment was a furnace and a huge crucible.

In the center of the room was a table on which the rays of the light were concentrated; it was scattered with engravers' tools, and on the sand cushion lay a steel plate evidently nearly completed.

This apartment was Jason's workshop.

That, by an ingenious architectural device, it was a secret chamber was proved, as turning down the light he crossed the floor and opened another panel in the wall.

Passing through he stood in an elegantly fitted-up dressing-room.

Closing the panel he stepped to the dressing-table, and taking one of the many bottles which stood upon it, he applied the lotion it contained to his hair and beard.

In a few moments its effect was apparent.

Instead of the rich, tawny hue it had been before, it was now jet black.

It made a wonderful change in his appearance.

No person would have taken him for the same man.

A sarcastic smile crossed his face as he surveyed himself in the mirror.

"It is good to have two identities," he muttered. "That, and only that, has saved me from detection so long."

He proceeded to attire himself in a scholarly-looking suit of black, and then putting on a pair of gold-mounted spectacles he left the dressing-room, closing and locking the door behind him.

Passing through the bed-chamber he stepped into the hall and descended the staircase.

As he reached the lower hall he saw a female servant engaged in sweeping and he remarked affably:—

"Good-morning."

"Good-morning, sir," the domestic replied. "Your breakfast is waiting."

"I shall not require any," he answered. "Have lunch ready at the usual hour."

As he spoke thus he opened the door and passed into the street.

It was not, however, the street in which the hotel where Blackwell Bill had seen him stood, but another, and the house had an appearance of eminent respectability.

Upon the door was a silver plate bearing the name of Hoffman.

As he passed along the street two young men met him; one turned to the other.

"Do you know who that is?" he asked.

"No," was the reply.

"That is the celebrated scientist, Dr. Hoffman."

His companion turned again to look with added interest, for Dr. Hoffman was a celebrated character.

Well had Jason said it was good to have two identities.

CHAPTER V.

NOT DEAD YET.

THE man who had made the remark to his companion had spoken the truth.

By the name of Dr. Hoffman, Jason was well and favorably known to the public.

He was a member of almost all the learned societies of any note, and had delivered papers and lectures on scientific subjects to the magazines and before large audiences.

His peculiar forte, however, was in popularizing scientific subjects, and his detractors averred that if ever he evolved an original idea it was by accident.

However that might be, he was a welcome guest in the highest social circles, and that was the point at which he aimed.

Who could suspect that secret chamber and the passage from the hotel that led to it?

As he walked along for two or three blocks several people bowed to him; he returned their salutations courteously, and when he saw a passing hack he hailed it and was driven to the Grand Central Hotel.

Reaching it and asking for Miss Ashmore, he was at once shown to a private sitting-room.

Celeste, or as Blackwell Bill had called her, the countess, was awaiting him.

Clarisse was not present.

Carefully closing the door he drew a chair close beside her, and asked:

"What is the reason of this sudden visit?"

"Danger."

"Of what kind?"

"Several."

"What is the main one?"

"Clarisse has been recognized."

"The devil!"

"Yes."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Who was your informant?"

"Hilton."

"Who recognized her?"

"The diamond dealer."

"That is bad. She must be got out of the way at once. Where is she now?"

"In her bedroom."

"I will see her presently. Now for the next danger."

It was with evident hesitation Celeste answered:

"The girl."

"Adele Rivers?"

"Yes."

"Well, what of her?—quick!"

"She has escaped."

A fearful oath left Jason's lips.

"When did it occur?" he asked.

"Yesterday."

"Why was I not informed?"

"We at once sent word to all the agents," she answered, nervously.

"Why not to me?"

"We thought we might be able to find her and bring her back without that necessity."

"Which means you were afraid to let me know."

Celeste made no reply. Jason rose and paced the floor impatiently for several moments.

"How did it happen?" he asked, stopping suddenly.

"Jacobs could not explain. She must by some means have become possessed of duplicate keys."

"Jacobs shall die," Jason said, fiercely. "Have you exhausted your budget of evil tidings yet?"

Celeste hesitated.

"There is something else, then?" Jason said.

"Yes."

"Well, what is it?"

Still Celeste hesitated for a moment or two, then she said, nervously:

"The ring is stolen."

"The ring?"

"Yes."

"The Brazilian's ring?"

There was such an added fury in his look and tone that Celeste's face paled, and she made no reply.

"Answer me," he said fiercely. "Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

"How was it stolen?"

"I do not know unless the girl took it."

For a minute or two longer Jason paced the floor impatiently; when at length he stopped all his anger seemed to have passed.

"Is that all?" he asked, calmly.

"No, the man we had most to fear is dead."

"Old Stealthy?"

"Yes."

"I was already informed of that fact by Blackwell Bill. But how did he come to be spotted?"

"We were informed by the department informer and telegraphed to the agent at Philadelphia. He had Bill and Knuckle Ned on hand. They boarded the train, and from the description easily recognized him."

"His death will relieve us of considerable anxiety. Have you any more information?"

"Yes."

"Go ahead then."

"The new five is spotted."

"Ah. They were poor work at best. I have the new twenty nearly ready, and I will summon a meeting at the

Refuge to-night and call the fives in. You must attend the meeting."

A look of evident fear crossed Celeste's face.

"I must attend the meeting?" she repeated.

"Yes."

"Not—not for trial?"

"No, unless there is some charge against you, I have none to make."

Celeste's relief at this assurance was plain to be seen.

"And Clarisse?" she asked.

"Let her remain in her chamber and pretend to be ill until to-morrow. Then I will find a place for her to lie shady for a time. Be on hand yourself at the cottage at ten to-night."

"I will be there."

"Very well. Until then remain with your sick friend upstairs."

Leaving the hotel and taking a carriage, Jason was driven back to his residence, where he partook of lunch, and then proceeded to his study, which communicated with the dressing-room.

Meanwhile Blackwell Bill had rejoined Knuckle Ned at Benicia Ben's saloon.

It was a dive of the lowest class, situated in one of the streets branching off from the lower Bowery, and was frequented by the most desperate class of criminals.

Bill found his pal assassin seated at a table smoking a cigar with a hot whisky standing beside him.

"Well," he asked, "how did it pan out?"

"Rich."

"How much?"

"Five hundred."

"Queer?"

"No, good U. S. Mint."

"Correct. Then divy up."

The division was accordingly made, and after another drink together the two worthies repaired to a faro-bank close by to buck their blood-money against the tiger.

In the course of a few hours they returned in ill-humor, each of them having lost more than half of his ill-gotten spoils.

Repairing to the pool-table they began to play, and both being more than half intoxicated they soon got into a row with each other.

Both were on the point of drawing their weapons, when an old, shabbily-dressed man entered the saloon.

As he advanced towards the two disputants he made a peculiar signal that, though almost imperceptible, had the effect of quieting them at once, and Blackwell Bill proposing they should have a drink, asked the new-comer to join them.

To do so he was nothing loath, and the three seating themselves at one of the tables, Knuckle Ned asked, in a low voice:

"What is it?"

"A general meeting at the Refuge to-night," the shabby-looking man answered, "and don't shove any more fives."

"What's up?" Blackwell Bill asked.

"Don't know," was the reply. "Those are the orders."

Draining his glass, the messenger departed, while the two assassins exchanged surmises as to the cause of the order having been given.

They could come to no satisfactory conclusion, but they both agreed upon the necessity of their sobering up, and repairing to a neighboring hotel, they went to bed.

Shortly after dark they arose, and leaving the hotel, took a hack and were driven to the vicinity of Harlem High Bridge.

It was yet but little after nine o'clock, and they repaired to a neighboring saloon and had several drinks.

The occupation was so congenial that they did not notice how the time was passing until the clock struck ten.

Then, with a parting drink, they left the saloon, and crossing the bridge, walked for a distance of a mile or so along the river.

They cast frequent glances behind them as they did so. No one was in sight, however, and they went on in blissful unconsciousness that they were being followed like a shadow by a man.

The man was Old Stealthy!

CHAPTER VI.

A FORTUNATE CHANCE.

THE detective had indeed had an almost miraculous escape.

The blow, violent though it had been, had not wholly stunned him, and had it not been for the sudden jerk of the car as it swept around the corner he might have succeeded in saving himself.

As it was, however, it caused him to lose his balance and hurled him from the platform.

This circumstance, however, instead of being, as it seemed, fatal, was in reality the cause of his preservation from death.

The sudden motion of the car flung him clear of the embankment upon which the train was running.

At the foot of the embankment, which was not a high one, was a small lake.

It was into the water of this lake that Old Stealthy was thrown.

The force with which he struck the water was painful in the extreme, and for a moment or two deprived him of consciousness.

Like a stone he sank to the bottom, but the cold plunge had the effect of reviving him, and he struck out for the embankment.

Almost exhausted, he succeeded in reaching it, and for several moments he lay there more dead than alive.

His head pained him fearfully, and every inch of his body was sore, yet he congratulated himself upon his almost miraculous escape.

Rising to his feet, he stood for several moments looking around him.

His head whirled around so that he thought he would fall again, but after a few moments the dizziness partially left him, and climbing up the embankment, he stood upon the track.

Either by chance or design, the place for the murderous assault had been well chosen.

There was no habitation in sight either way, and the detective started to walk along the track as fast as his bruised and aching limbs would allow.

For half a mile or more he went on.

Still there was no sign of any dwelling.

Half a mile or so further, and then he could discern a light in the distance.

It no doubt came from some farm-house, and Old Stealthy stood badly in need of rest.

If he once reached it he had no fear of prevailing upon the occupants to furnish him with dry clothing and means of conveyance to the nearest telegraph station.

Even yet, he thought with satisfaction, he might be able to outwit his intended assassins.

Suddenly through the silence rang out sharp and shrill a woman's cry.

It seemed to be ahead of him, and all his feeling of pain and weariness gone, Old Stealthy pressed forward.

As he did so the cry was repeated.

At the same moment from a thicket of bushes not two hundred yards away flashed the rays of a lantern.

In an instant the detective drew his revolvers.

He knew that the cartridges, being waterproof, were not injured by the plunge into the lake, and the weapons could still be depended on.

In two or three minutes he had reached the spot from which the light had proceeded.

It now had vanished and the woman's cries no longer broke the silence.

Old Stealthy listened intently.

As he did so the sound as of some one making their way through the bushes fell upon his ears.

With an agility surprising in an old man he dashed to the spot.

Then he saw the two ruffians carrying between them the seemingly inanimate form of a woman.

On the instant his weapons were leveled.

"Halt! you ruffians," he commanded, "or I will drop you in your tracks!"

The men stopped.

The next moment two bullets came whistling past the detective's head.

Crack—crack.

Old Stealthy's weapons spoke simultaneously.

Both the ruffians fell.

In an instant the detective was beside them.

"Curse you, take that!"

It was one of the fallen ruffians who spoke, and the words were accompanied by the report of a revolver.

Again a bullet whistled within an inch of the detective's head.

It was a close shave, but before the shot could be repeated Old Stealthy had wrested the weapon from the fallen ruffian's hand.

"You scoundrel!" the detective said, "you deserve that I should shoot you where you lie."

The man's only answer was a groan.

It was evident he was badly wounded.

Old Stealthy knelt beside them.

The other ruffian he saw was stone-dead, and this one had been shot in the breast.

His hand clutched wildly at his heart.

"I am dying," he moaned.

The detective saw that the man's wound was a dangerous one, if indeed, not mortal.

The girl who had not been quite unconscious, stood by with clasped hands trembling violently.

"Where were these scoundrels taking you?" he asked.

The girl made no reply.

Old Stealthy was puzzled, but drawing nearer he perceived the reason.

She was gagged.

In an instant he had removed the gag and repeated the question.

The girl uttered an hysterical cry.

She was evidently on the point of fainting.

Seeing it was useless to attempt to converse with her, the detective supported her with his arms.

"I am a friend," he said. "Come with me."

"Yes, yes," the girl cried, clinging to him. "Save me, save me."

"I will," Old Stealthy said. "Come along."

Half carrying, half assisting her, the detective made his way to where the light was shining.

It was as he had expected, a farm-house, and he knocked loudly on the door.

In a few moments it was opened.

"What do you want?" a man said, gruffly.

"Shelter for this young lady and assistance."

"Assistance for what?"

"To convey a wounded man here."

"Who wounded him?"

"I did."

The man made an attempt to close the door.

"Get out of this, you blasted murderer," he was beginning, when the detective flung his weight against the door, flinging it wide open.

The man did not know whether to show fight or run.

Old Stealthy threw open his coat displaying his shield. "I am a United States detective, and I command you to assist me," he said.

This statement changed the whole state of affairs at once.

All the household was soon aroused, and while the girl was left in charge of the women, the farmer and his two hired men accompanied the detective to the spot where the wounded man lay.

He was already unconscious, and placing him on the mattress they had brought with them they carried him to the house.

The body of the dead man was also carried from the spot where he had fallen, and laid in an outbuilding.

A doctor was at once sent for, and, after the farmer had provided the detective with a change of clothing, he hitched up his horses to drive him to the nearest town, which was three or four miles distant.

The girl insisted on accompanying them.

"I am not safe here," she persisted. "Others of the scoundrels will learn where I am, and again abduct me."

Old Stealthy acceded to her request, and the three were soon driving rapidly towards town.

By this time the morning had fairly broken.

When the town was reached it was after six o'clock.

Driving direct to the telegraph office the detective sent a message ordering the arrest of the two ruffians.

The women he did not mention; he wished to keep them for another time.

In a short time an answer came that the train had already arrived, and the passengers departed.

Old Stealthy sent another message countermanding the former one, and drove to a hotel, where he left the girl.

Telling her he would return shortly, he proceeded to the office of the chief of police, and, making his true character known, assumed the responsibility of the death of the ruffian on affidavit to be used at the inquest should he not be able to attend in person.

He also made arrangements to have the affair kept as quiet as possible, and to have the wounded man at the farm-house watched until he was sufficiently recovered to be removed to the hospital.

Having completed the arrangements, he returned to the hotel where he had left the girl.

He had given his word to the chief that either she or her affidavit, with a satisfactory reason for her absence, would be forthcoming at the inquest, and he wished to learn how she came in the position in which she had been when he rescued her.

He found her tolerably calm, and, having dressed her hair and re-arranged her disordered attire, she looked, though very pale, remarkably beautiful and prepossessing.

Now as he looked at her, a resemblance to some face or picture he had seen struck him forcibly.

"How can I ever thank you, sir, for what you have done for me?" she said.

"I only performed my duty," Old Stealthy answered. "Now it is my duty to send you safely back to your friends."

"Alas!" the girl answered, "all my friends are far away."

"Where are they?"

"In California."

"And how came you here?"

"It is a long story and also an improbable one, but I assure you it is true."

"I should like to hear it. What is your name?"

"My name is Adele Rivers."

"Adele Rivers!"

The detective repeated the name in a tone of astonishment. He remembered now that he had seen a face resembling her so closely as to be indistinguishable in a portrait purchased by the parents of a missing girl, as a clue to find her. The name of the missing girl was Adele Rivers. He had not been engaged upon the case, but the detective who was had furnished indisputable proofs of her death, and her parents had returned, heart-broken, to their home in the West.

"Yes," the girl answered.

"Can it be possible that you are the young lady who was abducted about six months ago?"

"I am."

"And where have you been since?"

"In Washington?"

"In Washington?"

"Yes; I have been kept a close prisoner in a house on one of the avenues. It is occupied by a man named Jacobs, who is ostensibly a picture dealer, but who is one of the greatest scoundrels on earth."

"How did you manage to escape?"

"Through the aid of my jailer, an old mulatto woman, who became attached to me and wished to work her spite upon Jacobs, who had deceived her daughter. She opened all the doors the night before last, and I took the midnight train for New York. I thought if I could reach there, I would be safe with an old schoolmate of my mother's until I could tell my parents I was alive."

"And why did you not go through?"

"Because, at Philadelphia a man whom I knew to be an accomplice of Jacobs got on the car, and fearing I should be recognized, I jumped off just as the train was moving."

"What did you do then?"

"I did not know what to do. I stood in the depot wondering how to act, when I heard an old farmer telling another he wanted to engage a governess for his daughters. He was a kindly looking old man, and, when his companion went away, my feeling of despair making me bold, I offered my services. He regarded me at first with a suspicion that made me feel

ready to sink through the floor, but when I told him I was utterly friendless, he took compassion on me and told me he would try me. He had driven to the city in his own buggy, and in about an hour afterwards we started for his farm, which is about ten miles from here. That was last night. They were all very kind, and I went to bed feeling happy, for the first time in months. When I awoke, I saw two men standing by my bed, but before I could scream they pressed a sponge over my mouth, and I became unconscious and did not revive until a short time before you came to my rescue, when I screamed, and then they gagged me."

Old Stealthy listened in silence until she paused for breath, and then he asked:

"Can you imagine their reasons for keeping you a prisoner?"

"I cannot, except in one way."

"And what is that?"

"To force me to become the wife of a man named Jason."

"Jason?"

"Yes. A peculiar looking man and yet a handsome one, reminding you of a lion. He has great masses of tawny hair and a flowing beard. He called upon me several times and offered me my freedom, on the condition of becoming his wife."

"Which you refused?"

"Certainly. Do you think I would exchange captivity for degradation?"

The detective was already interested in the girl; as he saw the proud arch of her graceful neck, and the flash of her beautiful eyes as she answered, he felt his interest in her increase.

"No," he answered, "I know you would not."

For several moments after he thus made answer he was silent; he was trying to place this man Jason from the girl's description, but could not.

"This mulatto woman who aided you to escape," he said at length, "also knows this Jason?"

"Yes, and hates though she fears him."

"She is also an enemy to Jacobs?"

"Yes, before I left she gave me a ring, that she said I must keep until I could find some person who had the power to use it."

"A ring?"

"Yes."

"Have you it still?"

"Yes."

"Will you show it to me?"

"With pleasure. I will give it to you, you are a detective, and may know what she meant by speaking of its power."

As she spoke she placed her hand in the bosom of her dress, and taking out a small package, gave it to the detective.

Removing the wrapping, Old Stealthy took out a ring of antique workmanship.

As he looked at it an exclamation of surprise escaped his lips.

He recognized it at once.

It was the one that had been given by the messenger to Don Rodrigo's wife as a token the request for the jewels and bonds was genuine, and which the lady had foolishly sent back to him knowing that he cherished a superstitious fancy, that when the ring no longer was on his finger some bad luck was sure to befall him.

"My dear young lady," Old Stealthy said, "you have done me a great service in giving me this ring. The old woman

spoke truly when she alluded to its power. And now what are your own plans?"

"I have none except to get to New York, and seek the protection of my mother's friend."

"What is her name?"

"Mrs. Morton, she lives at 17 East Blank street."

"Then if you will accept my escort, I will see you safely under her care."

The girl murmured her thanks, and ordering breakfast, the detective awaited the arrival of the next train for New York.

In less than an hour it came along, and by noon they were in the city.

From the depot they were driven direct to 17 East Blank street, only to meet with disappointment.

The housekeeper and her husband were the only occupants of the house. Mr. Morton and his family had gone to Europe.

Adele was in despair until the detective suggested a way out of the difficulty.

He was acquainted with an estimable widow lady who kept a young ladies' boarding-school in the suburbs of the city, and taking her there he placed the girl in her charge.

Adele's gratitude was heartfelt and sincere, and the school-mistress, whose name was Mrs. Fraser, willingly undertook to do all that lay in her power to make her happy until her parents could be communicated with.

Having got clear of this charge Old Stealthy sent a cipher dispatch to Washington, ordering Jacobs and his establishment to be kept under surveillance; then he set himself to work to track his would-be assassins of the previous night.

In order to do this he disguised himself as a bum of the most dilapidated type, and took in most of the places where he thought they would probably resort.

At last he struck them as they were coming out of the pool-room; and followed them to the hotel where they engaged rooms.

During the time they slept he had changed his costume to that of a respectable old gentleman, and then returning to the hotel, waited for them to reappear.

He had a carriage in readiness, and when they entered the hack he followed.

Dismissing the carriage a short distance from where they had done the one that had conveyed them to the spot, he saw them enter the saloon.

Then waiting patiently until they came out he saw them cross the bridge, and then stealthily he crept after their footsteps like a shadow.

CHAPTER VII.

AT BAY.

AFTER crossing the bridge the two ruffians walked rapidly for a mile or so along the river.

At last they came to a tract of unoccupied land that had the appearance of a deserted quarry.

But one building was in sight—a rather large wooden cottage surrounded with a growth of scrubby and stunted evergreen trees.

No lights shone from any of the windows—it had the general appearance of being deserted.

It was towards this cottage the two ruffians made their way.

As they passed through the stunted trees surrounding it the shadow detective was able to draw nearer to them without the fear of being seen.

By the time they had reached the cottage he was not a hundred yards behind them.

They proceeded straight to the front door.

The cottage was evidently their destination.

The detective drew still nearer to see by what means they would gain admittance, and if any passwords were exchanged to try and overhear them.

Nothing of the kind occurred, however.

As the men approached the door swung open, seemingly of its own accord.

The men passed in.

The door closed again.

The detective remained where he was for a few moments longer.

Other footsteps approached.

In a few moments two other men came in sight.

Approaching the cottage, they were also admitted in the same silent, mysterious manner.

For nearly a quarter of an hour longer Old Stealthy waited.

No other visitors came along.

Evidently the last had arrived.

The detective determined to approach nearer to the cottage and reconnoiter.

Hardly had he begun to creep stealthily from his place of concealment than the door again opened.

This time a man came out.

For a moment or two he stood looking around him and then walked rapidly away.

In an instant Old Stealthy's mind was made up.

Rapidly he crept along in the shadow of the bushes to intercept the man.

By the time he reached him the bushes hid them both from view—both of the door and all the lower windows of the cottage.

The detective had already drawn one of his revolvers.

Then with a bound like that of a tiger, he sprang upon the man, seizing him by the throat, and hurling him to the ground.

As he fell the muzzle of the revolver was pressed against his forehead.

"Utter a word," Old Stealthy said, in a thick, hoarse voice, "and I will blow your brains out."

The fallen man obeyed.

He did not utter a chirp.

There was something in the contact of the cold muzzle of the revolver, and the tone of voice in which the threat had been spoken, that warned him he had better not.

"Answer me in a whisper," the detective said. "Do you know who I am?"

"No."

"I am Old Stealthy."

The man's astonishment got the best of his discretion.

"Old Stealthy," he gasped.

"Yes. You thought I was dead, didn't you?"

The man made no reply.

Still keeping firm grasp of his prisoner's throat, the detective replaced his revolver in his pocket, and drew a bowie-knife.

"Do you want to die?" he asked.

"No," the man answered.

"Then, I will let you live—on conditions."

"What are they?"

"I want to get into that cottage yonder. Do you understand?"

"No."

The detective pricked him sharply with the keen point of the knife.

"I want you to tell me how to do it with safety. Do you understand now?"

"Yes, but I dare not."

"You must. I will give you three seconds to make up your mind. Tell me what I want to know and I will see that you get into no trouble with your pals. Refuse, and I will cut your throat from ear to ear, and go it alone."

The detective paused a moment and then resumed:

"Now—one."

As he spoke he placed the knife to the prisoner's throat.

"Two."

No answer.

"Three."

The knife cut through the skin and the man weakened.

"I will tell you," he said.

Old Stealthy removed the knife.

"You are wise," he said. "Now, what are the passwords?"

"There are three."

"Name them."

"The first is 'caution;' the second 'silence;' the third 'death.'"

"What are the questions?"

"There are none."

Again the knife was pressed against his throat.

"Beware," Old Stealthy said. "Deceive me and it will avail you nothing. I am going this hand alone, but I am not such a fool as not to have help within call if I need it."

"I am telling you the truth."

"You had better."

"I swear it."

"Then tell me when to give the passwords."

"When you first enter a light will be flashed into your face; then give the first."

"Caution?"

"Yes."

"Go on."

"A man will speak to you; then give him the second."

"Silence?"

"Yes. When you see the word 'Traitor' give the third. Then you will have passed into the meeting-room."

"Are you telling me the truth?"

"I swear it."

"And once there, what then?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"No. You will have to take care of yourself."

The detective was silent for a few moments.

"I will give you one counted minute," he said at length.

"What for?"

"To say your prayers if you have any to say."

"You are not going to kill me?"

"Just that."

"You promised you would spare my life."

"Yes, if you told me the truth."

"I have told you the truth."

"You lie. Do you think I am a child?"

"No."

"Then why do you try to deceive me?"

"I have not done so."

"You have. What is your number?"

It was a random shot but it struck the mark.

"Thirty-three," was the answer.

"Then you have not told me all, and you deserve to die. As I said, I will give you a minute for your prayers."

"Spare me, and I will tell you all."

"Go on then."

"The States are known by their first letters, and their numbers as arranged in alphabetical order."

"Then if your number is thirty-three, what is your letter?"

"N. Y."

"You belong then to New York?"

"Yes."

"What is your name?"

"Thimble Ted."

The detective was silent a few moments.

"The letter of a man from California would be C, and his number 5?"

"Yes."

"Very well," the detective answered: "I will test whether you have spoken the truth or not. If you have lied you had best tell me now."

"I have not."

Old Stealthy released his grasp of his prisoner's throat.

The next moment he had seized his wrists and snapped a pair of handcuffs upon them.

Then, before the man could utter a word of protest, a gag was thrust between his teeth and his ankles were firmly tied together with a cat-gut.

Dragging his prisoner further into the shelter of the bushes, the detective took off his own spectacles and carefully disarranged his attire; then for a few moments he stood in thought.

He knew he was taking big chances on his life, but he was determined to do it.

He never considered personal danger when his duty required him to act.

His duty required him to do so now.

Assuring himself his weapons were ready to his hand, he approached the cottage.

As he reached the door it opened.

He passed through, and it closed again.

He was in total darkness.

Suddenly a bright light was flashed into his face with such brilliance as to almost deprive him of sight for a few seconds.

"Caution," he said.

Instantly the light vanished and he felt a hand grasp his arm.

His first impulse was to shake it off, but remembering the part he had to play he restrained himself.

Following its guidance he went along the hall; a door opened and closed behind him; then along another hall and down a flight of stairs.

As they reached the foot of the staircase the unseen guide spoke.

"What do you want here?" he asked.

"Silence!" Old Stealthy answered, and instantly another door opened in front of them.

Another flight of stairs was descended and another corridor traversed, when suddenly on the wall ahead of them, as if thrown by a magic lantern, appeared the word:

"Traitor."

"Death!" the detective exclaimed, and instantly a light shone through the darkness, showing more than half a dozen men standing around.

"Well, cull," one of them said, "what might your letter happen to be?"

"C," Stealthy replied, laconically.

"Number?"

"Five."

"Ah! and your flash name?"

"Pin-and-Needle Ned," the detective replied, naming a well-known 'Frisco sneak-thief whom he chanced to know was at the time lying with a broken limb under an assumed name in a San Francisco hospital.

"When did you come on?"

"Day before yesterday. Came through on the profesh, but struck the town broke."

"How did you strike the cottage?"

"A pal gave me the steer."

"Who is the pal?"

"Thimble Ted. He said he'd vouch for me. Trot him out and see if he goes back on his word."

The men drew aside and consulted together in whispers.

"I guess he's all right," one of them said. "Pass him in. Ted'll be back in less than half an hour; so there can't be any harm done."

Then turning to the detective he added:

"Shake."

The detective obeyed, giving him a regular thieves' grip as he did so, and the other turned to his companions.

"Pass him," he said.

Hardly had the words been spoken than an opening appeared in the seemingly solid wall, and as the detective passed through it noiselessly closed again.

A strange and startling spectacle was presented to his gaze.

A long, narrow, low roofed cellar in which there were more than a hundred men assembled, all of them whose faces told belonged to the class of criminals.

The cellar was lighted by oil lamps fixed to the wall, and at the further end was a sort of platform upon which about half a dozen persons were seated.

All were men, with one exception, and her he recognized at once.

She was none other than the woman with whom he had held the conversation in the hotel at Washington—Miss Ashmore, Celeste, or as Blackwell Bill had styled her, the countess.

A man was standing addressing the crowd.

He, from Adele Rivers' description, the detective also recognized.

It was Jason—the man with the lion-like head and flowing tawny mane of hair and beard.

He spoke with a rough but natural eloquence, such as suited his audience; he told them of Old Stealthy's death, of the detection of the counterfeit five-dollar bill, and informed them that a new twenty was nearly ready, and that it would be delivered to them through the proper agents.

He also gave a description of Adele, and added, that to any one of them who found her and brought her back to him, he would pay a thousand dollars of lawful money.

He still was speaking when suddenly through the cellar rang a sharp, shrill whistle.

In an instant he ceased, while all the others on the platform rose to their feet.

The hushed silence of the audience was broken by a storm of curses, and all drew their weapons.

Old Stealthy was not slow to imagine the cause of this sudden change.

The whistle was a signal of danger.

Perhaps his own true character had been discovered.

Instantly he drew both his revolvers, and awaited further developments.

His heart beat a little faster, but his nerves were steady as a rock.

It was not the first time he had faced death with overwhelming odds against him.

He had not long to wait.

Hardly had he edged himself clear of the main body of the crowd than the wall again opened and a man with handcuffs upon his wrists entered the cellar.

"You have been betrayed," he cried. "Old Stealthy, the detective, is amongst you."

A tempest of blasphemy answered the words, and glancing around, Thimble Ted, for such was the new-comer, pointed his finger at the detective.

"There he stands," he cried. "Seize him, and cut his heart out."

Like a pack of ravenous wolves the ruffianly horde sprang towards where the detective stood.

He saw the game was up.

There was nothing for him to do but die, and he was determined it should be game.

With a sudden spring he cleared himself of the crowd, and, placing his back against the wall, stood at bay.

"Yes," he cried, fiercely, "I am Old Stealthy, and here are the proofs of my identity."

CHAPTER VIII.

A DESPERATE ESCAPE.

As Old Stealthy uttered his defiance he leveled both his revolvers.

Still undaunted by this threatening attitude, the mob pressed on.

Crack—crack!

Simultaneously the weapons spoke.

Two men fell.

The detective allowed no more time to be lost. Sweeping the revolvers in a semi-circle before him, they spoke in an almost continuous volley.

The opposing ruffians had not counted upon catching such a Tartar.

Not one of his shots was wasted—every bullet found its billet.

The villainous crowd fell back.

This was the opportunity for which Old Stealthy had watched.

But one shot remained in the chamber of each of his weapons.

These two he gave them the benefit of, and then sprang forward.

Thinking they saw their opportunity the miscreants again pressed forward.

They had miscalculated the detective's intention however.

His advance was only momentary; then snatching a pair of revolvers from the grasp of two of the fallen ruffians, he retreated to his original position.

It must not be supposed the ruffians were idle with their weapons.

They blazed away furiously, but their excitement rendered their aim wild and some propitious chance seemed to watch over the detective.

As yet not a shot had touched him and with the weapons he had taken from the fallen men he again opened a deadly fire.

The noise of the conflict in that confined space was almost deafening.

Suddenly, however, clear and sharp as a trumpet's call through the deadly din rang out a voice.

"A truce, detective."

Old Stealthy laughed scornfully.

"Do you think I am a fool to be taken in that way?" he asked

A double report pointed the question, and two more of the ruffians fell before his face.

Again the voice rang out in tones of command.

"Lower your weapons, men. I would parley with this detective."

The ruffians at once obeyed the order; seeing that they had done so, Old Stealthy also desisted.

He did not lower his weapons, however, and as the smoke cleared away a man advanced from the crowd.

The detective covered him with one of his revolvers.

"Halt!" he commanded.

The man, who was none other than Jason, obeyed and threw his hands above his head.

"See, I am unarmed," he said.

"What do you want?" Old Stealthy asked.

"I wish to speak with you."

"Speak ahead."

"I advise you to surrender."

"Do you take me for a fool?"

"Not if you do as I advise."

"And if I don't?"

"Then you will be a fool."

"I am a fool then."

"You will not surrender?"

"No."

"If you will, I promise you that after a fortnight's imprisonment, which shall be made as tolerable as possible, you shall be set at liberty."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Promises are cheap."

"I will do as I say."

"Yes, and once I am in your power, if you forget your promise, what then?"

"I will not forget."

"Enough of this cheap talk," Old Stealthy said, sternly.

"Go back among your fellow miscreants, or I will drop you where you stand."

"You will not surrender then?"

"I have told you no."

"Then take the consequences of your own obstinacy," Jason said. "We are fifty against one, and die you must."

"Not until I send a few ahead of me to see the track is clear," the detective retorted, scornfully. "Now, fall back, I tell you, before I open fire again."

Jason made a step backwards, as if to obey the order, then, with a single spring forward, he hurled himself upon the detective.

So sudden and unexpected had been the attack that Old Stealthy was taken wholly by surprise.

Still he did not, as Jason had doubtless expected, fall to the ground.

Instead he closed with his assailant.

Dropping one of the revolvers, he drew his knife.

At such close quarters fire-arms were useless.

A knife also flashed in Jason's hand.

Neither underestimated his adversary.

Both knew it must be a struggle to the death.

They were both powerful men and trained athletes.

As far as skill and strength were concerned it was about an equal match.

But the odds were against the detective.

The rest of the miscreants gathered around the combatants.

Suddenly one of them saw his chance.

Jason and the detective were standing almost motionless except for the quivering of their sinews, each trying to gain the advantage.

Grasping his revolver by the barrel, one of the ruffians sprang forward and dealt Old Stealthy a violent blow on the back of the head.

He dropped like a stone, unconscious.

How long he remained in that condition he did not know.

When he again revived the surroundings were the same.

He was lying on the floor of the cellar where the fight had taken place.

The ruffians were attending to those who had fallen before his deadly fire.

Jason alone stood beside him.

"So," he said, as he saw Old Stealthy open his eyes, "you have come to at last?"

Though bewildered at first, recollection soon returned to the detective.

He made no reply to the other's remark, but attempted to rise to his feet.

His head was still whirling around from the effects of the blow he had received, and, before he could carry out his design, four of the ruffians had advanced and pinioned his arms.

"Now," Jason went on, "do you not see it would have been better for you to have accepted my terms?"

"No; I do not," Old Stealthy answered; "I did the best I could, and I could do no more. The result, to be sure, is the same, and now bid your fellow-ruffians cut my throat and end the matter at once."

Jason's sarcastic tone changed at once.

"You are a brave man," he said, "and I respect you. You would not surrender, but I offer you the same terms now as I did before. The term of your imprisonment will be a little longer, that is all."

As has already been said, there was a strange mixture of good and evil in Jason's nature. Though the evil far predominated, he yet had the nobility to respect a vanquished though mortal foe.

Turning to the ruffians who held the detective a prisoner, he commanded:

"Take him to the vault. Let him have plenty to eat and drink, and a light. Make him as comfortable as possible, but beware how you let him escape. If you do, your lives shall answer for it."

He turned away as he finished speaking, and his captors led the detective to a door at the further end of the cellar.

Opening it, they passed down a flight of steps and along a corridor until a massive iron door confronted them.

Drawing back the bolt they thrust the detective into the cell beyond, and, placing a lantern on the floor, closed the door, leaving him alone.

Looking around he saw the cell was about a dozen feet square, the walls, floor and roof of cemented stone; its only furniture was a narrow wooden bunk, and the air was admitted by a series of narrow slits in the walls not more than two inches in depth.

Any hope of escape seemed out of the question, especially as during his unconsciousness the ruffians had gone through him and confiscated everything he had about him.

A second and third survey only confirmed this impression; there was plainly nothing to do but to await as patiently as possible the pleasure of his captors.

He was almost exhausted by his experiences of the past day and night, and throwing himself upon the wooden bunk he fell asleep.

He was wakened by a rapping on the iron door of his cell. Starting up he saw a small panel in it had been opened, and a man was looking through the aperture.

"Here is some grub for you," he said. "You'd best hurry up and take it, for it's all you're likely to get for a day or two."

He thrust a loaf of bread and a can of water as well as a couple of candles through the opening as he spoke, and Old Stealthy taking them the panel was again closed.

By this time the oil in the lantern was burning dimly; by the time he had eaten sparingly of the bread and drank part of the water it went out altogether.

He did not light either of the candles; he did not know but he might yet have to use them as food. He could not tell how long his captivity might endure, and whether, when the bread they had left was exhausted they would provide him with any more.

Hours passed, how many he could not tell, before he again heard his jailer's footsteps in the passage, and again the panel was slid aside.

He had determined on his plan of action.

"Hello in there," the ruffian said. "Step up here for your grub."

Old Stealthy answered him with a deep groan.

"For Heaven's sake get me some brandy," he said, "I am in horrible pain."

The ruffian laughed hoarsely.

"Perhaps you want a doctor too," he said. "Come up here and get your grub or go without."

"I can't rise," was the answer, and the jailer raising his lantern to the aperture saw him writhing on the floor, apparently in the greatest agony.

"Curse you, are you going to get up?" the ruffian said. "I can't stand here all day."

"I cannot," the prisoner answered.

"Then stay where you are," the jailer said, and closing the panel walked away.

An hour more passed.

Again Old Stealthy heard footsteps outside.

A moment or two more and the panel was again slid aside.

"Hello, in here!" a voice asked, "how do you feel now?"

The detective returned no answer, and the light being again flashed through the opening in the door, he was seen lying face downward on the floor of the cell.

"Looks as if he'd kicked," the ruffian said, turning to a companion.

"See if a bullet will wake him up," the other rejoined.

The next moment a bullet struck the floor not a foot from where Old Stealthy lay, but he made no movement.

"He's passed his chips in, sure enough," the ruffian who had fired the shot said. "Let us have a look at him. I expect Jason will kick."

As he finished speaking Old Stealthy could hear the bolt being withdrawn, and the two ruffians entered the cell.

"Keep your weapon handy, and if he's up to any tricks plug him," one of the ruffians said to his companion, as advancing he gave the detective a by no means gentle kick.

Still there was no show of feeling on his part, and the ruffian who held the revolver lowered it.

"He's dead, sure enough," he said. "Turn him over on his back."

The other ruffian bent down to do so.

This was the opportunity for which Old Stealthy had been waiting.

As the ruffian seized him to turn him over, he received a blow behind the ear that dropped him like a stone, and the next moment the detective was on his feet.

Almost before the other ruffian could realize what had happened, he had closed with him and wrested the revolver from his grasp.

For a moment or two they struggled desperately.

At last the detective gave him a blow on the forehead with the butt of the revolver that knocked him out of time.

Hardly had he done so than there was a report, and a bullet whistled past his head.

The other ruffian had revived and discharged his weapon.

Quick as a flash Old Stealthy pressed the trigger of the captured weapon.

His aim though hasty was true, and the bullet went crashing through the villain's brain.

His companion still lay unconscious, and thrusting their revolvers in his pocket, and seizing the keys and lantern, Old Stealthy passed out of the cell bolting the door behind him.

He had no difficulty in finding his way to the cellar in which the meeting had taken place; after a short delay he also discovered the secret of the opening in the wall and passed through.

With the aid of the keys he had no further trouble in making his way out of the cottage, and soon he once more stood in the open air at liberty.

Rapidly making his way to the bridge he crossed it and then walked down town.

When he first made his escape from the cottage the sun was setting; now as he passed a news-stand he saw the date on the papers with surprise.

Two days had passed since he had been made a prisoner!

And in those two days much had happened.

CHAPTER IX.

WORSE THAN DEATH.

OLD STEALTHY had partially related Adele Rivers' story to Mrs. Fraser, when he had placed her in her care.

It had touched the heart of the worthy school-mistress, for she had had daughters of her own.

The girl's modest and winning ways also attracted her.

while Adele from the first found herself drawn to her new friend.

It had been agreed that Adele should remain at the school only as a visitor, and she was given a pleasant little bedroom near that of Mrs. Fraser.

Here at least she felt safe; she slept soundly, and the following morning Mrs. Fraser brought her some necessary articles of attire.

After the night's healthful sleep and attired in the tasty wrapper the school-mistress had loaned her she looked quite bewitching.

She was introduced to some of the elder scholars, among whom she found several that she thought she could be friends with; and it was with a lighter heart than she had known for many a day, that after breakfast she sat down and wrote a letter to her parents informing them of her safety.

She was at no loss for their address, as her father was well known as one of the wealthiest mine owners on the Pacific slope.

Having finished the letter, she addressed it, and gave it to a servant to post, and then retired to her own little room, her heart filled with a feeling of thankfulness and content.

She was sitting by the window looking out upon the garden, when a tap came on the door.

"Come in," she answered.

The door opened and Mrs. Fraser entered.

"There is a visitor for you in the reception-room, Adele," she said.

The girl looked at her in surprise.

"A visitor—for me?" she echoed.

The school-mistress smiled at her look of astonishment.

"Yes, a gentleman," she said.

"A gentleman? My dear Mrs. Fraser you must be jesting."

"I am not. There is a gentleman, Mr. Raymond, waiting to see you."

At this explanation Adele's surprise seemed to increase.

"Mr. Raymond," she repeated. "I know no such gentleman."

"Oh, yes, you do."

Adele made no answer, and Mrs. Fraser continued:

"Do you not know some one called Old Stealthy?"

"Oh, yes. And is his real name Raymond?"

"Yes, Fred Raymond. I have known him since he was a boy."

"A boy?"

Mrs. Fraser laughed.

"You did not think I was so old, did you? But it is the truth."

"You did not tell me this last night?"

"No. You were too tired. But now hasten and come down and see him. He must be weary waiting."

Pausing only a moment before the mirror, to give an extra touch to the arrangement of her hair, Adele followed Mrs. Fraser to the reception room.

As they entered, a gentleman rose to greet them.

In everything, except that he wore a heavy gray beard and mustache, he was the same who had brought Adele to the house the previous night.

He smiled as he noticed her start of surprise at his changed appearance.

"You must not think I have become aged twenty years in a single night, Miss Rivers," he said. "It is one of the ne-

cessities of my profession that we never appear twice identically the same."

As he made this explanation Adele smiled also.

"Ah! I understand now," she said. "You have added to your disguise."

The visitor bowed.

"Exactly," he said, "and I take it as a compliment that it deceived your young eyes."

Adele made no reply, and the visitor went on, in a more serious tone:

"I come, Miss Rivers, as the bearer of good news."

Adele did not answer, but looked her expectancy.

"Before I tell you what it is," the visitor continued, "may I ask if you have yet written to your parents?"

"Yes," Adele answered, "I wrote to them this morning."

"Have you posted the letter yet?"

"Yes."

An angry glance seemed to flash for a moment behind the glasses of the heavily-rimmed spectacles.

"If you had only known it was unnecessary."

"Why?" Adele asked, a sudden joyful hope lighting up her face.

"Because your parents are in the city."

"Here in New York?"

"Yes, or at least here in the suburbs, which is the same thing."

Adele started from her chair, her hands clasped in an ecstasy of happiness.

"Oh, take me to them at once!" she cried.

"It was for that very purpose I called this morning," was the reply. "A carriage is waiting, and it only depends upon yourself how long before you meet them."

Without making any reply Adele flew rather than walked from the room, in a few minutes she returned ready to depart.

Kissing Mrs. Fraser, and telling her that she would bring her parents that afternoon to thank her for her kindness to herself, Adele left the house and was handed by her visitor into the carriage.

Then entering himself the carriage rolled away.

"Do mamma and papa know I am alive and coming to see them?" she asked.

"Oh, yes. I called upon them before I did upon you, and they are waiting anxiously to clasp you in their arms."

But little more was said during the drive; Adele's breast was too full of happy anticipation to speak.

It was not long before the carriage drew up in front of an imposing-looking building standing in grounds of its own, which were inclosed by a high iron fence.

Assisting her to alight, her companion led her up the gravel walk to the front door and rang the bell.

A surly-looking servant in livery admitted them, and on Adele's companion asking for Dr. Grabinch, showed them into a small but elegantly-furnished apartment.

Leading the girl to a seat her companion stood looking at her for several moments in silence.

"Do you not know me?" he said, at length.

Adele looked at him in surprised alarm.

"Yes," she answered; "you are Mr. Raymond, or Old Stealthy, the detective, who has already saved my life, and is now about to restore me to my parents."

A low, mocking laugh left the man's lips.

"Do you think so now?" he asked.

As he spoke, with a rapid motion he removed the specta-

cles and wig, letting a mane of tawny hair fall nearly to his shoulders.

A cry of horror left Adele's lips.

"Jason!" she ejaculated.

"Yes," was the answer. "You must forgive the lover's ruse, for I love you, and have sworn that you should become my wife."

All the color had fled from the girl's face, leaving it pallid almost as that of a corpse; her lips seemed to have suddenly become rigid and could but shape themselves into one word:

"Monster!"

"Not so," he replied, modulating his voice to tones very soft and tender. "I love you. I cannot live without you. You must become my wife."

Nerving herself Adele rose to her feet.

"Such words are worse than an insult," she said, looking queenly beautiful in her scorn. "Time and time again you have pressed your odious suit, and I have repulsed you as I do now. Know that I would sooner die than become your wife."

The concentrated scorn of her words and tone made him writhe in spite of himself.

"Do you know you are wholly in my power?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered, "I know it, but this is not your servile tool's house in Washington."

He laughed—a low, evil laugh.

"No," he said, "it is not. Shall I tell you what it is?"

She made no answer, and he went on:

"It is a private lunatic asylum."

A look of ghastly horror overspread her face; it seemed as if the words she would have uttered were frozen on her lips.

Rapidly he continued:

"Here you are buried from the world. All you may say will be taken but as the ravings of a maniac. The only man who might help you, Old Stealthy, is dead. I offer you in exchange for a solitary cell and a strait-jacket, a luxurious home and my devoted love. Will you not accept it?"

The girl suddenly seemed to recover her power of speech.

"No," she cried wildly, "I will endure all the tortures of hades before I consent."

"But you do not know the horrors of this place," he answered, all the evil in his nature now thoroughly aroused. "Yet you can imagine a brutal keeper and a beautiful patient wholly in his power. Would not even my caresses be preferable to his? Think of this before you make your answer final."

The girl shuddered but made no reply. A hand of ice seemed grasping her heart. Her pulse alone was kept throbbing by the wild, despairing prayer thrilling her being that God in his mercy would grant that she might die.

There was silence for the space of a minute or more, it was broken by the voice of Jason.

"Again, and for the last time I ask you, will you consent?"

A wild hysterical laugh left her lips.

"No, no," she cried, "a thousand times no. Approach me and I will tear your evil heart from your breast."

Jason crossed the room and rang the bell.

Instantly the door opened, and a man dressed in black entered.

"Ah," the new-comer said, "I see the patient is violent. She needs restraint."

As he spoke he beckoned to some one in the hall, and two rough looking men entered the apartment.

In answer to a nod from the individual in black, who was

none other than Dr. Grabinch the proprietor of the place, they advanced towards the frantic girl.

Seizing her, they dragged her struggling and screaming from the room.

For the time, she was indeed mad.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNWILLING GUIDE.

OLD STEALTHY was once more at liberty.

His desperate scheme had proved successful, and he was free.

But two days had elapsed since he had been taken prisoner.

That time was more than sufficient to allow his enemies to cover up their tracks.

He had, practically, to begin his work all over again.

There was one consolation, however.

He had learned enough of the secrets of the criminal gang to make re-organization necessary.

If he had to start afresh, so had they.

He had also learned of the new counterfeit about to be placed in the market.

On the whole he had reason to congratulate himself.

As well be supposed, he had not had the ring on his person when he was captured.

Making his way as rapidly as possible to head-quarters, he told his story.

He had no difficulty in proving his real character, and within two hours the cottage was raided. With the exception of the ruffian with his dead pal in the cell, it had no occupant.

Nothing of any importance was found.

It had evidently been used solely for the purpose of a resting-place for the ruffianly gang.

The living ruffian was at once taken into custody, while the dead body was properly attended to.

The prisoner was identified as an ex-convict who had but recently served out his time.

It was found impossible to induce him to make any confession, and he was locked up until the detective was ready to make a charge against him.

Old Stealthy immediately set to work to try and pick up his lost clews.

He again set out to pipe his two intended assassins.

For this purpose he assumed another disguise.

In the character of a weather-beaten old English Jack tar he made a round of the dives in the locality where he had before found Knuckle Ned and his pal.

He struck them both the next afternoon in the same saloon where he had previously discovered them.

They were taking a drink together, and Knuckle Ned was evidently bidding his pal adieu.

Drawing near enough to them to be able to overhear their conversation, the detective ordered a drink.

"I wouldn't go if I were you," Blackwell Bill was saying.

"You know we were ordered to be on hand."

"I don't care a curse," his pal answered. "No one but you will know anything about it, and I tell you I'm stuck after the gal."

"All right," the other said. "If you've made up your mind, I've nothing more to say; but there isn't a darned red in it."

"I know that well enough, but I'm going all the same. If

we're wanted you can give in some gag that'll make it all right."

"I'll fix that part of it all right," Blackwell Bill assured him, and after a few more remarks Knuckle Ned left the saloon.

Watching his opportunity, Old Stealthy had quietly poured the contents of his glass upon the floor, and now he ordered another drink.

It had been his first intention to follow Knuckle Ned, but as he listened to their conversation he decided not to do so.

It was evidently some private racket the ruffian was going upon, and he determined to let him go, and instead devote his attention to his pal.

Accordingly, as the ruffian left the saloon, he addressed him.

"Have a drink, mate?" he asked.

Blackwell Bill accepted the invitation and they entered into conversation.

"I mayn't be very high-toned looking," Old Stealthy explained, after awhile, "but I've got the money, and that's what talks. And if I ain't quite so young as I once was I've got more bottom in me yet than half the young whippersnappers that smoke cigarettes and take lemonade in a wine-glass."

"You're on for a good time," Blackwell Bill said.

"You just bet I am. I'm only beginning now, but when I've been on it two or three days you'll hear Rome howl."

"You'll have to be pretty well heeled to keep it up more than a month here."

"Well, I guess I'm pretty well all right in that respect. I look pretty rough, but I'll go into the best hotel in this city, and they daren't put me out while I've got the shot in the locker—not much! If you don't believe me come and try it. You can have wine if you want it, but I'm going to stick to the straight old whisky right through."

The detective's manner was the arrogant one of a more than half intoxicated man, and Blackwell Bill thought he had caught on to a soft thing.

"I don't care about wine myself," he said, "but I'll go along with you."

"All right, come on. I'll do the thing in style, and don't you forget it. We'll have a private room all to ourselves, just the same as if I had on a broadcloth suit and a silk hat."

With a rapid wink to the bar-tender Blackwell Bill accompanied him from the saloon.

Walking along until they reached a respectable but third-class hotel the detective entered and demanded a private room for himself and friend.

The detective was such a hard-looking character that the clerk hesitated, but the sight of a huge roll of bills decided him, and they were shown to a room, when Old Stealthy ordered a bottle of whisky.

"You don't mean to drink all that, do you?" Blackwell Bill answered.

"Yes, and another, too, if we had anything to do between whiles. Darn this old hotel, anyhow! I only came because I wanted to show you I ain't no slouch if I am tough-looking."

"If we had a pack of cards?" Blackwell Bill suggested.

"Yes, that's it. Ring the blasted old bell and order half a dozen packs if you want to."

"No," Blackwell Bill answered; "they would not let us have them."

"The hades you say! I guess money'll fetch them up."

"No; it is against the rules of the house; but if you want a quiet little game, I've got a pack in my pocket."

"Why didn't you say so before, then? Hand them out. What will we play?"

"I'm not much of a hand at anything. One game is pretty much the same as another to me," Blackwell Bill said. "What do you play best?"

"Old sledge."

"Seven up?"

"Yes."

"All right."

The cards were by this time produced, and they cut for deal. It fell to Blackwell Bill, and he proceeded to shuffle them in a seemingly clumsy way.

"Cut," he said, laying them on the table when he had finished.

He glanced at his companion as he spoke, and an exclamation of mingled alarm and astonishment left his lips as he saw himself covered by the muzzle of a revolver.

"This farce has gone far enough," Old Stealthy said.

"Keep your hands where they are, on the table."

The last words were spoken in a tone that told the ruffian it would be for the good of his health to obey, and he did so.

"Your game is up, Blackwell Bill," Old Stealthy went on, "and you are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner!"

"Just that."

"What for?"

"Attempted murder."

"Who are you?"

"You have seen me before."

"I never did."

"I am the man you and your pal tried to murder—Old Stealthy."

The ruffian made no reply; the information seemed to have stunned him.

"I arrest you now for attempted murder," the detective continued, "but I have another warrant for you for murder committed."

The ruffian's face became paler, if possible, but still he made no answer.

"Shall I handcuff you, or will you come along quietly?" Old Stealthy asked.

"I'll go along," Blackwell Bill said, sullenly, "but you'll find you've got the wrong man."

"Stick to that story, but it won't do you any good. You're good for a lifer, if you don't happen to dance on nothing some fine morning."

Though the ruffian tried to assume an air of bravado, it was palpably forced.

"It's got to be proved first," he said.

"That's easy enough done, and you know it."

"Well, put the bracelets on me and stop chinning."

"Do you want to be locked up?"

"Do you think I'm a darned fool?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out."

"You are, eh?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you needn't get locked up unless you want to."

"I needn't?"

"No."

"Then I don't want to."

"I suppose not; but are you willing to pay for your liberty?"

"How?"

"By giving me some information I want."

"I could, but I dare not."

"You are afraid of your pals?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I agree to keep you out of their way until they are taken, and let that charge against you drop?"

The ruffian hesitated.

"Remember the alternative is either the gallows or a life sentence."

For a few moments more the ruffian was silent.

"Give me a hundred dollars and pay my passage to Australia, and I'll do it," he said at length.

"I'll do it when I find you have not played me false."

"You give me your promise?"

"Yes, but remember if I find you out in any treachery you either die on the instant or go to the State's prison."

"All right. I'll act on the square."

"Then begin by taking your left hand and lay your weapons on the table."

With evident reluctance the ruffian obeyed, laying a revolver, a knife, and a pair of brass knuckles on the table before him.

"That is right," Old Stealthy said. "Now tell me how you were aware I was on the train the night when you attempted to kill me."

"It was telegraphed from Washington."

"Who by?"

"That I do not know."

"Did you receive the telegram?"

"No. It was received by the agent."

"The agent of your criminal organization?"

"Yes."

"Who is he?"

"He is known as California Cale."

"And he told you I was on the train and to lay for me?"

"Yes."

"Did he give you a description of my appearance?"

"Yes."

"And also mentioned the two women?"

"He did."

"Who are those women?"

"One is known as the countess and the other Clarisse."

"What is their lay?"

"Can't say, exactly. Society racket mostly, I guess."

"Where are they now?"

"The countess is at the Grand Central Hotel."

"And the other?"

"Lying low somewhere."

"What for?"

"Something she did in Washington."

"Ah!" Old Stealthy said, as a sudden idea flashed through his mind. "Was it anything about some diamonds?"

"I believe it was."

The detective was silent for a few moments.

"This Jason," he said abruptly, at length, "is the head of the league."

"Yes."

"Where is he to be found?"

"I do not know."

"You lie."

"I do not. He is everywhere. No one knows where to

find him at any time. He appears always when least expected."

This the detective reflected was in all probability true, and he changed his line of questioning.

"Has that new counterfeit twenty been distributed yet?" he asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Have you any of them?"

The other hesitated and Old Stealthy said sternly:

"Fork them over."

Reluctantly Blackwell Bill placed his hand in his pocket and produced a roll of bills.

Examining them the detective saw they were a most dangerous counterfeit; even his practiced eye could hardly distinguish them from the genuine.

Placing them in his pocket, he said:

"Now I want you to take me to where Clarisse is hiding."

The ruffian was evidently startled by the abruptness of the demand.

"I do not know where it is," he stammered.

"Then hold out your hands."

Still Blackwell Bill hesitated.

"Hold out your hands," the detective repeated.

Reluctantly the ruffian obeyed and the next moment a pair of handcuffs were locked upon his wrists.

"Now," Old Stealthy went on, "do you still refuse to take me to the woman's hiding-place?"

"I tell you I do not know where it is."

"Then I have only been wasting my time with you. Get up and come along."

"Where to?"

"The Tombs."

"But you promised me you would let me clear if I told you all you asked me."

"You have not told me all. I want to know where this woman is hiding."

Again for a moment or two Blackwell Bill hesitated.

"I cannot tell you," he said.

"You mean you will not?"

"No, but I cannot describe the place."

"You know where it is, then?"

"Yes," reluctantly.

"Then you could show me."

"I might."

"You must."

"You have me foul and I can't help myself."

"You will show me then?"

"Yes, if you will take these bracelets off."

"I'll attend to that presently," Old Stealthy answered. "In the meantime you will wait here until I return."

A gleam of anticipation shot from Blackwell Bill's eyes, but it was speedily succeeded by a look of disappointment as the detective taking a stout cat-gut from his pocket tied his ankles firmly together. "As I said you will wait here until I return, and I advise you not to make any noise. If you do, it will be the worse for you."

With this parting advice Old Stealthy left the room, locking the door and placing the key in his pocket; then proceeding to the clerk's office he took him aside, and displaying his shield informed him of as much of the circumstances as he deemed necessary, and left the hotel.

By this time it was growing dusk.

More than an hour elapsed before the detective returned.

He had completely changed his disguise, and now appeared a respectable old country gentleman.

He drove up to the door in a buggy, and getting a boy to hold the horse, entered the hotel.

Making himself known to the clerk he proceeded to the room in which he had left Blackwell Bill.

The ruffian was still seated in the chair where he had left him, and closing the door Old Stealthy asked:—

"Have you reconsidered your promise, or are you still unwilling to show me Clarisse's hiding place?"

"I can't help myself, and I'll do it," was the sullen answer.

"Very well, but remember what I told you. Any treachery, and you die on the spot."

Blackwell Bill made no answer, and in a few moments his ankles were released, and the hand-cuffs removed from his wrists.

Together they passed out of the hotel.

Making the ruffian take the lines the detective followed him into the buggy, and ordered him to drive to the place in question.

He also took good care to let him know that his finger rested on the trigger of his revolver, a circumstance which was evidently but little to Bill's satisfaction.

For nearly an hour they drove on until Harlem was reached; a mile or so beyond the unwilling guide checked the horse in front of a pretty suburban residence standing in grounds of its own.

"This is the place," he said sullenly.

CHAPTER XI.

TRAPPED.

As Blackwell Bill checked the horse and announced that their destination was reached, Old Stealthy turned to him.

"See here," he said, "are you giving it to me straight, or are you trying to play me false?"

"I am giving it to you straight."

"All right, but if you are attempting any treachery, you had best tell me now. You know that I always carry my life in my hand, and I am not thinking of my own danger, but I do not want to take life when I can help it, and as there is a God above us, at the first signs of you playing me false I will drop you in your tracks."

"I am not trying to do so," was the answer.

"Very well. Then get out of the buggy."

The ruffian obeyed, Old Stealthy keeping him covered with his weapon the while, and then himself alighted.

"It is doubtful if they admit us," Blackwell Bill said.

"Yes, they will," Old Stealthy answered, "when you tell them you have a message from Jason."

"I dare not do that."

"You have your choice between that and death."

"But Jason may be there."

"We must take our chances. What name does Clarisse go under here?"

"Mrs. Morland."

"Very well. You will ring the bell and ask to see her. If we are admitted, well and good. If not, you must say that you were sent by Jason to introduce me to her."

"It will be as much as both our lives are worth."

"Yours will be worth less, if you don't do as I tell you to do."

The ruffian saw there was no help for it, and opening the gate, he advanced up the graveled path to the front door, followed by Old Stealthy, who still kept his finger on the trigger of his revolver.

The detective was playing a bold game.

He had determined to solve the various mysteries, and not cease until he had extirpated this organized gang of criminals, and he did not hesitate to employ any means to attain his desired end.

He knew as well as Blackwell Bill could tell him, that he was taking his life in his hand, but personal danger was always the last thing that found any place in his calculations.

Reaching the front door, Blackwell Bill rang the bell.

"Remember," the detective breathed in his ear, "at the first sign of treachery you die."

In a few moments a female servant opened the door.

"Is Mrs. Morland in?" Bill asked.

"Yes," the servant answered, "but she is ill, and it is too late for her to receive visitors."

Bill turned, perplexed, to the detective.

"Is the master or mistress of the house in?" Old Stealthy asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, "the doctor is at home."

"Will you ask him if we could speak with him for a few minutes."

The servant left to get the desired information, but in a few minutes returned, saying the doctor would see them.

Showing them into an elegantly furnished apartment, she left them alone for a few moments, during which the detective took occasion to impress on his companion's mind that his hand still rested on the butt of his revolver.

Hardly had he done so than the door opened and a middle-aged man entered the room.

He was dressed in black, presenting a sort of clerical appearance, but his face was far from prepossessing.

"To what am I indebted for the pleasure of this visit, gentlemen?" he asked.

"You are the master of this house, are you not?" Old Stealthy asked.

"I am."

"You have a lady staying with you named Mrs. Morland?"

"Yes. She is an invalid and she placed herself under my treatment, at the same time taking apartments in my house."

"You are a physician, then?"

"That is my profession."

"I was not aware of that, and you must pardon our intrusion at this rather late hour, but I most earnestly wished to see Mrs. Morland to-night, on a matter of great importance."

"You are a friend of hers?"

"No, indeed, I am entirely unacquainted with her, but a mutual friend intrusted me with a message of rather a delicate nature to be given her in person. He sent this gentleman, who is acquainted with her, to introduce me."

"Rather a singular proceeding," the doctor said, "but I will inquire if she has retired yet or not, and will receive you. What is the name of this mutual friend?"

"Jason."

"Oh! indeed. I have heard her mention him. Pardon me a moment or two."

He left the room as he spoke, and Old Stealthy moved nearer the door; in a few minutes the doctor returned.

"She has not retired and will receive you," he said.

With a sudden, unexpected motion the detective grasped him by the wrists; the next moment a pair of handcuffs were snapped upon them.

The doctor was too astonished for a moment or two to speak.

"What—what is the meaning of this outrage?" he managed to gasp at length.

"Keep cool," the detective said calmly. "It is only a precautionary measure. I know nothing about you, and it is better to be on the safe side. Now I shall also be obliged to gag you."

As he spoke he thrust a gag between his teeth and then turned to Blackwell Bill.

All the time he had kept his eyes fixed on that worthy, and now he proceeded to treat him in the same manner he had done the doctor.

A couple of minutes more and the ankles of both were securely tied, and leaving the room the detective closed and locked the door putting the key in his pocket.

Hardly had he done so than the servant came along the hall.

"Show me to Mrs. Morland's room," he said. "Your master and my friend are particularly engaged and do not wish to be disturbed."

This was said so naturally that not a shadow of suspicion entered the domestic's mind, and she showed him to a room on the first landing.

Knocking on the door he received an intimation to enter, and doing so he found himself in the presence of a lady who was seated in an easy-chair reading.

He recognized her at once as one of the women he had followed from Washington.

The room was a large one, elegantly furnished; one side of it was covered with exquisite carvings in satin wood.

As he entered the lady half rose to receive him and motioned him to a chair.

"You bring a message to me?" she said, smiling sweetly.

"Yes."

"From Jason?"

"You are Clarisse, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Do you not remember me?"

"No."

"Yet we have met before."

"Where?"

"In Washington."

"It is strange I do not remember you. I seldom forget a face."

"It was at the art rooms of our mutual friend Jacobs."

"Indeed! On what occasion?"

"The one when you so ably acted your part as the wife of a defaulting Treasury clerk."

Clarisse laughed.

"Yes," she said, "I remember the occasion well, yet still I cannot place you."

"It is on account of that affair you are now forced to become a most charming invalid, is it not?"

"It is; but you have not yet delivered the message from Jason."

"Nor will I until you have refreshed your memory as to where you have seen me before."

Clarisse gave an impatient stamp with her foot.

"I am in no humor for such trifling," she said. "Deliver the message at once."

"I have no message to deliver."

"You have not?"

"No?"

"Then what brings you here?"

"To recall myself to your remembrance."

"Are you insane, or what?"

Old Stealthy rose and quietly turned the key in the lock of the door.

"I am not insane," he answered. "Do you not remember a certain Hoskins from Hoskinsville, Ohio?"

A short, gasping cry left Clarisse's lips, and she started to her feet.

"You are Old Stealthy!" she exclaimed.

"The same. Now let me ask you to leave that revolver where it is."

The woman's hand dropped to her side, and she asked:

"Have you come to arrest me?"

"I shall be obliged to do so."

"Is there no way I can escape?"

"Yes, one."

"What is it?"

"By accompanying me quietly to the city and turning State's evidence against your accomplices. Then I will undertake to procure bail for your appearance and keep you in a place of safety until you are needed in court."

The woman made no answer for several moments.

"It is a fair offer," she said at length, "but I dare not—not now."

"When, then?"

"When they are safe in custody I might do so."

"Then give me the points I want to know to be able to find and arrest them."

"If I do so you will not arrest me?"

The detective hesitated a moment or two; the woman's information might be invaluable to him.

"Not until it is absolutely necessary," he said, "and then I will take care it shall be a mere formality."

"What do you want to know?"

"In the first place, where to find Jason."

"That I do not know. None of us do. When he wants us he comes to us, not we to him."

The detective again was silent; this was the point of all others he wished to learn.

"You know the girl Adele Rivers?" he asked, at length.

"Yes."

"She was kept a prisoner in Jacob's house?"

"I do not know?"

"Do not equivocate. Do you not know she was?"

"Yes," was the reluctant answer.

"What was Jason's object in keeping her a prisoner?"

"He was in love with her, and wanted to make her his wife."

"Is that the truth?"

"It is."

"But he had some ulterior motive?"

"Probably."

"Who was it telegraphed to Philadelphia the fact of my being on the New York train?"

Without making any reply, the girl suddenly assumed a listening attitude; then a peal of scornful laughter left her lips.

"Ah, ha! shrewdest of shrewd detectives," she cried, "once again you are outwitted."

As she uttered the words an opening suddenly appeared in the paneling of the wall, and three men armed with revolvers stepped into the room.

At the same moment the door was burst violently open, and half a dozen armed men stood upon the threshold.

CHAPTER XII.

A SLIGHT CLEW.

OLD STEALTHY realized in an instant he was in a trap, but he did not weaken.

Neither did he hesitate; it was in moments of extreme peril such as this, that his perceptions were the quickest and clearest.

Hardly had the paneling slid aside and the door been broken in than his determination was taken.

He knew he had but one chance for his life.

In an instant he had drawn his revolvers.

With a single bound he cleared the distance between himself and the men who had slipped from behind the paneling.

As he did so his fingers pressed the triggers of his revolvers and two of the men fell.

The third was hurled to the floor before his furious onslaught.

The next instant he was in the space behind the panels.

He had seen such contrivances before, and thoroughly understood their mechanism.

Sheltering himself behind them he closed the panels.

As he did so a hail of bullets struck the woodwork.

Before the volley could be repeated the aperture was closed.

For the present, at least, he was safe.

None of the bullets had penetrated the wood.

There was a bolt on the inside of the panel, and he shot that into its socket.

His only danger now lay in being attacked from the other entrance to the secret apartment.

When on duty he was never without several necessary articles about him.

One of these was a pocket lantern.

Producing it he struck a match and lighted it.

As he did so he heard a sharp metallic clang beneath his feet.

A moment later a voice from the room beyond cried mockingly:

"Stay and perish there like a rat in the trap into which you thrust yourself, bold Mr. Detective. The other egress is closed, and you must sharpen up your teeth if you hope to gnaw through that woodwork before you are suffocated."

Paying no heed to the taunt, Old Stealthy cast the rays of his lantern around.

The closet in which he was a prisoner, was about six feet by three in size.

The roof was not a foot above his head, and three of the walls were of rough masonry.

The floor was of wood, and it could only be by that way, that the closet could be entered, except through the sliding panels.

He now understood the cause of the sound he had heard beneath him.

The words of the ruffians in the room beyond had explained it.

They had said the other egress was closed; the mechanism

of the trap which was in the floor, had been rendered useless.

Drawing his heavy bladed bowie knife, the detective tried the ceiling and found that it also was of stone.

There plainly was no possible hope of escape except through the paneling, and the taunting words of the ruffians showed they felt secure in that direction.

The detective had to admit that he was in a decidedly desperate position.

The air in the closet was already close and foul, and with him a prisoner there, in a few hours at most it would become deadly.

By the time he had made this survey of his cell the sound of voices in the room beyond had ceased, and he set to work to try and see if there was no way of again opening the panels.

That it was secured in some way on the outside he had no doubt, but he thought it would be strange, if with his heavy bladed knife he could not manage to cut his way through.

There was another thing to be considered, however.

It was hardly probable the ruffians would leave the outer room without some guard set, and in that case any hope of escape would be out of the question.

Still he reasoned if he were able to cut even a small hole through, it would supply him with air and save him from suffocation.

Accordingly he set to work to cut a hole through.

For several minutes he worked, and then he saw how hopeless the task was.

The paneling was double, and between the two layers of wood was a sheet of iron.

To attempt to cut through this was out of the question, and Old Stealthy was on the point of resigning himself to the inevitable.

Suddenly an idea struck him.

Were all the wood cut away he must be able to find the place where the panels joined.

Taking his knife, he began at one end of the closet and cut a narrow strip of the woodwork away on the level of the floor.

It was tedious work, and an hour or more elapsed before he found the division.

It was a point gained, but he had not yet found the lock, and the atmosphere was fast growing more foul and sickening.

Commencing at the floor he cut another narrow groove upwards, and at length he found the spring.

He seemed now no better off than before, however, for it was firmly riveted into the iron plate.

There was plainly no way to open it except to find the spring, and that seemed an impossible task.

He would have perhaps to cut all the wood away before he could discover it.

He set to work with the energy of despair; he hacked away at the wood until the sweat poured off him in a stream, but still his progress was cruelly slow.

All the time the air was growing fouler, until at last it became a difficulty to breathe.

Still for hours he worked on, until at last nearly all the woodwork was stripped from the iron.

His light went out, and still he worked on in the dark, feeling with his unoccupied hand after each fresh splinter was removed.

His brain was whirling, and he had to draw his breath in short, quick gasps, when suddenly he felt a sort of groove in the iron, in which a narrow strip of broken steel rested.

He had found it at last.

The ruffians had broken the spring when they had secured the trap in the floor, and never dreamed of his undertaking such a seemingly impossible task as to strip the iron plate of its wooden covering.

Inserting the point of his knife beneath the broken steel he pried upon it, and in another moment the panels once more slid aside.

He was reckless whether all the ruffians were lying in wait for him in the outer room or not; all he wanted was fresh air, and rushing through the opening, he fell heavily upon the floor in a state of semi-unconsciousness.

In a few minutes the purer air revived him.

Rising to his feet and looking around, he saw that the morning had broken and the early sunlight was streaming through the windows.

He was the only occupant of the room.

Leaving it he descended the staircase, but met no one.

He peered into the room in which he had left the self-styled doctor and Blackwell Bill on the previous night, but there was no one there.

The house seemed to be deserted.

Curiosity prompting him, he descended to the basement and into the kitchen, but still there was no sign of any human being.

The ruffians, evidently fearing the detective had not undertaken the expedition alone, had fled silently in the night.

Determining to take advantage of the fact Old Stealthy peered into the closets, and found plenty on which to make a substantial meal, and then re-arranging his disordered attire, he re-ascended to the upper floor, and passed out of the house.

As he did so, he saw an old man digging in the garden a short distance away, and he advanced towards him.

"Good-morning, friend," he said, as he drew near.

The old man stopped his work, and, resting on his spade, returned the salutation.

"You are at work early," Old Stealthy said.

"Not more so than usual. I've always been at it since I can remember."

"A good many years that must be. You look nearly as old as I do."

The old man seemed inclined to resent this imputation of juvenility.

"Looks goes for nothing," he answered. "I'm a good ten years older than ever you've been yet."

"You carry your age well."

"Yes, I haven't got much to complain of in the line of health," the gardener replied, evidently mollified by the compliment.

"A pretty place this," the detective remarked.

"Yes," the gardener replied, with a grunt, "the place is good enough. The only trouble is with the folks that live in it."

"Who does live here?"

"There's been many a one since I can remember, but the last was Dr. Fairburn."

"Does he not live here now?"

"He did up to last night. This morning he don't live here any more."

"What is the reason?"

"I don't know. I don't live in the house. I sleep in the loft over the coach-house, and have for the last ten years or more; but it seems they had quite a fight there last night."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, there were pistols fired, so the servant gals told me. They both of them packed up and left by daylight, and the rest of them was not long after."

"What was the cause of the trouble?"

"It was all about a woman, as I make it out. There was one called herself Mrs. Morland came to stay here, and she wasn't just what she ought to have been, and it was her all the fuss was about."

"How is it you did not leave with the rest of the household?"

"Because I belong here. I've lived here nigh on to twenty years. It's the landlord pays me my wages, and none of them trashy tenants here to-day and t'other place to-morrow."

"Did they say nothing to you when they left?"

"Oh, yes. Dr. Fairburn came and bid me good-bye, and he acted like a gentleman, I'll say that much for him. So did Mrs. Morland, and she gave a five-dollar gold piece and told me to keep it for luck. That's the kind of luck I like to hold on to," and the old man chuckled at his own supposed wit.

"Did they say they were coming back again?"

"No. The doctor he said they'd never come back?"

The old man paused, and then asked suddenly:

"You're not Dr. Grubb—Grubb—Grubbish, are you?"

"That is something like my name."

"What is it, then, if that ain't it?"

The old man regarded him with a curious expression of mingled doubt and curiosity, and Old Stealthy thinking that he might be able to gain some information, answered:

"My name is Dr. Grubwidtch."

"Yes, that's the name, sure enough," was the reply. "The doctor didn't speak it very plain, and my ears ain't as good as they used to be, especially early in the mornings."

"Why did you ask?"

"Because the doctor left a message for you."

"A message for me?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

The old gardener pushed his hat on the back of his head, and scratched his forehead as if to rake together his scattered ideas.

"Wait a minute till I get it just as he said it," he answered. "He told me to be particular and give it word for word."

The detective waited patiently.

Suddenly the gardener looked up.

"I have it now," he said, with an air of triumph. "It was 'Inquire for Jason at the Figurehead.'"

"Ah," Old Stealthy said, "you are sure that was the exact message?"

"Word for word."

"I am very much obliged to you, friend," Old Stealthy said, "and I hope you won't refuse to put this along with your gold piece for good luck."

He placed a five-dollar bill in the old man's hand as he spoke, and walked away, followed by his effusive thanks.

Both were well satisfied with the result of the interview.

The gardener had received what to him appeared a large sum for giving the message to the person for whom it was not intended, and the detective had struck what promised to develop into a clew.

CHAPTER XIII.

A CHANCE DISCOVERY.

OLD STEALTHY had found what promised to be a clew. As yet, however, it was only a promise.

The question was, where was the Figurehead, and what was it?

It might mean anything, but the probabilities were it was a hotel or saloon.

From the name it was probably situated near one of the rivers, yet to set out to search for it without having some idea of its locality would be an endless task.

The detective bethought himself of a person who could give him the necessary information if any one could.

This was a retired police officer whose memory extended over a period of nearly half a century, and he was always willing to relate his reminiscences.

On this account he was known among his acquaintances as "Old Dates."

To "Old Dates" the detective accordingly went.

The retired officer occupied a pretty little cottage in Harlem, not more than a mile or two from the scene of Old Stealthy's previous night's adventure.

The detective found the old man seated in the shade of a tree in his garden smoking a morning pipe.

He did not recognize his visitor at first, but upon Old Stealthy making himself known he greeted him cordially.

"Well," he said, when the visitor had seated himself, "what do you want? I know you are too busy to pay me a visit unless you wanted something."

The detective, who knew the old man's blunt ways, laughed as he answered.

"You are right," he said. "I came to you for information."

"You could not have come to any one more willing and able to give it, my boy," was the reply. "What is it you want to know?"

"I want to find out where a place called the Figurehead is, or if there is such a place at all."

The old man mused for a few moments.

"The 'Figurehead'?" he repeated at length.

"Yes."

There used to be a tavern called the Figurehead near Eighth street and the East river, but that was nearly twenty years ago," he said. "A man called Doyle took the place after that, and he took down the Figurehead from over the door and called it Doyle's Hotel. It changed hands two or three times after that, and about five years ago, which is the last I know of it, it was called the Ocean Hotel."

"That no doubt is the place, then," Old Stealthy answered.

"You know of no other place that would answer to the name?"

"No," the old man said. "I guess that must be the place you're looking for."

The detective thought so, too, and after passing a few more remarks and thanking the old man for his information, he took his departure.

Walking along until he saw a hack, he hailed it, and was driven to the vicinity mentioned.

After dismissing the carriage he walked on for several blocks, when he saw the hotel of which "Old Dates" had spoken.

The sign, "Ocean House," was still over the door, and entering, he advanced to the clerk's desk.

"Is there a Mr. Jason staying here?" he asked.

The clerk looked at him suspiciously before he answered:

"No."

"That is strange," the detective said, "for he told me to call and see him here to-day."

"When did he tell you that?"

"Yesterday."

"Well, then, it's my opinion he didn't want to see you."

"Why?"

"Because he left first thing this morning."

"He has been staying here, then?"

"Yes; he has been here quite a while. Let me see."

As he spoke the clerk turned over the leaves of the register for a few moments.

"He has been staying here nearly three weeks," he said when he had found the entry for which he was looking.

"Did he say where he was going?"

"Yes. He said he was going to St. Louis."

"Did he mention any time when he would return?"

"No. He said it was uncertain."

"And he left no message for me or any one?"

"No."

The detective thanked the clerk for his information and left the hotel.

He was far from satisfied.

He believed the clerk was deceiving him.

He determined to find out.

Hailing the first carriage he saw, he was driven to a costumer's on a side street off the Bowery.

In less than an hour he was again at the Ocean Hotel.

Now, however, his appearance was wholly changed.

No one could have recognized him.

He looked like a weather-beaten and grizzled mate or some other subordinate officer of a vessel.

He went into the hotel and registered as "John Jackson, second-mate of the brig *Huntress* of New Orleans."

He had been sick, he explained to the clerk, and unable to accompany his vessel on her last trip, and he was now day by day awaiting her arrival in port.

The story aroused no suspicion in the clerk's mind.

He was completely taken in.

It never entered his head that his sea-faring guest and the old gentleman who had inquired for Jason in the morning were the same.

All day long the detective hung around the hotel, breaking the monotony by occasional visits to neighboring saloons.

In order to keep up his character he ordered drinks freely, but very little of the liquor passed his lips.

Towards evening he took a stroll through the street in which the supposed Dr. Hoffman's house was situated.

As he neared the door he met the doctor returning home.

Old Stealthy now wore no spectacles; his eyes were sharp as needles.

The doctor passed him without bestowing a second glance upon him, but a strange suspicion was awakened in the detective's mind.

He watched the doctor enter the house.

Then he crossed the street to a saloon, the proprietor of which was standing on the steps.

Entering he called for a drink, and asked the proprietor to join him.

The drinks were handed out.

"Who was that tall, mild-looking chap went down the street just now?" Old Stealthy asked.

"The one with the gold spectacles and the long hair and beard?"

"Yes."

"That is Dr. Hoffman. He lives only a few doors down the street nearly opposite here."

The supposed sailor gave a look of surprise.

"Doctor, eh?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Douse my top-lights, then, if I'd have him doctor me. He looks more like the bloody pirate of the seething main that I saw years ago at the Old Bowery."

The saloon-keeper, as in duty bound, laughed at the joke of a customer who seemed likely to order more drinks, and thought no more of the matter.

Old Stealthy remained in the saloon till it began to grow dark.

Then he saw the doctor again leave the house.

Waiting for a few moments after he had passed the saloon, the detective followed him.

Walking to the nearest hack-stand he entered one of the vehicles.

As it drove away Old Stealthy approached another driver.

"Follow that carriage. If you do not lose sight of it you shall have double fare and a V for yourself."

The hackman had no intention of letting such an opportunity slip through his fingers.

"All right, sir," he said. "Jump in."

In another moment they had started.

For nearly an hour they drove on until High Bridge was crossed.

At last the hack stopped.

The driver alighted and opened the door.

"It has stopped," he said.

Old Stealthy thrust a five-dollar bill into the hackman's hand.

"Wait here till I return," he said.

"All right," the hackman answered.

In another minute the detective had passed the spot where the other hack was standing, and got Dr. Hoffman in sight.

He was walking rapidly towards an imposing-looking building, standing in grounds of its own.

Old Stealthy knew the place at once.

It was Dr. Grabinch's private asylum.

What did the doctor want there?

He was determined to watch and find out.

Ringing the bell the doctor was admitted.

The detective drew nearer and took up his station where he could see any person passing in or out without being seen himself.

For a quarter of an hour or more he waited.

No person came out.

The upper part of the building was in darkness.

Suddenly a light flashed from one of the windows.

Rapidly others appeared, until the whole upper part of the building was illuminated.

The detective was puzzled to account for it.

He was not, however, long to remain in doubt as to the cause.

Suddenly from one of the windows shot out a thin tongue of flame.

With an exclamation of dismay he sprang from his place of concealment.

He understood the cause of the sudden illumination now. The asylum was on fire.

CHAPTER XIV.

TRACKED.

As Old Stealthy made this startling discovery, for the moment all thoughts of the man he was shadowing were vanished from his mind.

Running to the gate he found it unlocked, and, passing through, advanced to the front door and rang the bell furiously.

As yet, to all appearances, the inmates of the building were unaware of the catastrophe.

The door was opened by a servant who was evidently inclined not to receive the visitor very amiably.

"The house is on fire," the detective said, without giving him time to speak. "Quick, the key of the fire alarm."

The key was hanging in the hall, and, snatching it down, the man handed it to him.

Old Stealthy had seen the box just opposite the asylum, and, in a few moments more, he had sounded the alarm.

Having done so, he again hastened to the building to see if he could be of any assistance in saving the unfortunate inmates.

As he passed through the gate a man brushed past him.

In his arms he carried a seemingly inanimate female form.

There was a lamp burning over the gate and the light fell full upon the faces of both.

The man Old Stealthy recognized at once as Dr. Hoffman, and he could not repress an involuntary exclamation as he fancied he also recognized the face of the woman.

The idea seemed so improbable that for a moment or two he could hardly believe it possible.

For several seconds he stood hesitating how to act.

Meanwhile, Hoffman with his inanimate burden was hastening towards where he had left the hack.

The detective's hesitation did not last long.

His determination was soon taken.

He hurried after the doctor.

Placing the woman in the carriage the doctor entered himself and was driven away.

Not a counted minute elapsed before Old Stealthy had reached the spot where his own carriage was standing.

The driver was already in his seat, and he sprang up beside him.

"Follow that carriage again," he said. "Do not let us lose sight of it, and I will make that five a ten."

Gathering up the lines, the hackman whipped up his horses and started in pursuit.

"I'll keep them in sight, never fear," he answered. "It ain't the first time I've had to do the like."

"No, I suppose not," the detective said, "but you can talk better after you have earned your ten. Keep all your attention just now on your horses and the carriage ahead of us."

The hackman had no more to say, and in silence they drove on towards the city.

Old Stealthy soon saw that the driver had spoken the truth when he had said he was no novice at that sort of work.

Very skillfully indeed he managed to keep the carriage in

sight without approaching near enough to cause the other driver to entertain any suspicion that he was being followed.

At length the street in which Dr. Hoffman's house was situated was reached.

The hack drew up in front of the door.

The detective at once ordered the hackman to stop.

"Turn around now, and drive off as glibly as possible," he said. "This will pay you, I guess."

He placed a twenty-dollar bill in the man's hand as he spoke, and jumped to the ground.

The hackman lost no time in obeying his orders and driving away.

Advancing towards the house the detective was just in time to see the girl carried into the house, the door closed, and the hack drive off.

For a moment or two he stood in thought, and then he walked toward the Ocean Hotel."

As he entered a man was coming out.

In an instant he recognized him.

It was Blackwell Bill.

Waiting until he had gone a short distance down the street, the detective followed him.

He was walking down town, and after he had gone a few blocks, Old Stealthy approached and laid his hand upon his arm.

"Say, mate," he said, "can you tell me where the Ocean Hotel is? I'm lying in dock up there, and I've somehow lost my bearings. I don't want to get into any strange port to-night, as I've got considerable money about me."

The detective appeared to be more than half intoxicated, and the surly look that had been on Blackwell Bill's face when first addressed changed, while an evil light shot from his eyes.

He was in hard luck, having that evening blown the last of his blood money into a faro game, and he imagined he saw a chance to make up his losses from the pocket of the seeming sailor.

"Yes," he said, "I'll tell you where it is. I live there myself, and am going there now."

"Glad I met you, mate," the detective answered. "There are so many land sharks around that shiver my timbers if an honest tar knows when he's safe. Come into this here caboose and have a sup of grog."

"No," Blackwell Bill said, hastily, "let us wait till we reach the Ocean House."

"Is it far from here?"

"A good step, but I know a short cut if you're not afraid of going in the dark."

The supposed sailor laughed uproariously.

"That's a good joke," he said. "Me, old Jack Jackson, that's been around the Horn twenty-three times, and took grog in most every port of the world, afraid to go in the dark."

"All right then. Come along. I only asked because some people are so suspicious you know."

"Yesh, thash so," the sailor whose intoxication seemed rapidly increasing answered, "but I'm none of thash sort."

With unsteady footsteps he followed the ruffian's guidance, until a dark, narrow street occupied entirely by ware-houses was reached.

It was a fitting place for any dark deed, such as that Blackwell Bill meditated.

It was his intention to conduct the seemingly drunken sailor to about the middle of the street and knocking him on the head, take his money and walk away.

The detective well understood this.

He did not intend to become a victim that night if he knew himself.

This fact Blackwell Bill was destined soon to find out.

Hardly had they got fairly into the shadow than his intoxication vanished as if by magic, and the ruffian found himself seized by the throat and borne against the wall, while the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his forehead.

"So, you scoundrel," the detective said, "you thought to bring me here to murder me, eh?"

The baffled ruffian could make no reply; the grasp of his intended victim on his throat was strangling him.

"I am going to release my hold on your throat," the detective went on, "but if you attempt any treachery I will send a bullet through your brain."

He loosened his grasp as he spoke, and the nearly strangled ruffian staggered as if he would fall to the ground.

"Hold out your hands," the detective commanded. "Quick, or as I live I will kill you."

There was a ring in the tone of voice in which the threat was uttered that warned the ruffian he had better obey; and reluctantly he held out his hands.

The next moment a pair of handcuffs were snapped on his wrists.

"Now," the detective said, "I suppose you know me?"

"Yes, curse you," was the answer.

The detective laughed.

"It's lucky for me that curses don't kill or I would have been dead long ago," he said. "But that is neither here nor there. I guess you have got to acknowledge that you haven't got the ghost of a show. Is it not so?"

"Yes," the ruffian acknowledged sulkily.

"Well, then, do you remember our former agreement?"

"Yes. I kept it square enough. I took you where you wanted to be took. When the jig was up I'd be a bloody fool if I didn't try to save myself, wouldn't I?"

"Are you willing to stick to that bargain yet?" Old Stealthy asked, ignoring the question.

"Will you stick to yours?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm with you."

"Very well. Now tell me, where is Jason?"

"I don't know."

"You are lying."

"I am not. I tried my best to find him to-night, and could not. No one ever can see him when they want anything of him. When he wants anything he's there every time."

"Were you looking for him when I saw you coming out of the Figurehead?"

The ruffian gave a start of surprise.

"You know that?" he said.

"I know more than you think," was the dry reply. "But you have not answered my question. Were you looking for him then?"

"Yes."

"And could not find him?"

"No."

"I can find him."

"You can?"

"Yes, and mean to do it to-night. I only want a few points, and those you can give me. You can count yourself lucky you are on the winning side, for the noble league of which you are a member has about run its course."

"I'll tell you all I know if you keep your promise with me."

"I'll keep it, never fear. Come along."

As he spoke the detective linked his arm in that of the prisoner and walked out of the dark street and on until he saw a hack; then, hailing it, he was driven to police head-quarters.

CHAPTER XV.

JUST IN TIME.

WHEN Adele Rivers was led away by the keepers of the asylum she was really mad.

She screamed and struggled so violently that it was with difficulty the men could prevent her from escaping from their clutches.

Jason saw he had gone too far.

He advanced towards the doctor.

"See that no unnecessary violence is used," he said. "Let her be treated kindly and brought to her senses as soon as possible. I need not tell you to beware how you trifle with me."

"You know, Jason," the doctor answered, "your commands are law."

"See that you keep the law, then," Jason answered, grimly.

Without making any reply the doctor followed the keepers from the room.

"Handle her as gently as possible," he said, "and place her in the padded cell."

This was done, and the doctor returned to his fellow villain.

"A day or two will bring her round," he said. "The shock was too sudden. I do not see what you want with the girl anyhow."

Jason shot a fierce glance upon him, before which the doctor quailed.

"That is my affair," he said. "You should know by this time that I allow no questioning as to my acts."

"I did not mean anything of that kind," the doctor said, apologetically; and after a few minutes more Jason took his leave.

The doctor drew a breath of relief when he had departed.

"An interview with him is like being shut up in a cage with an angry lion," he muttered. "However, it is safely over, and I suppose I must do as he says, and get the girl back to her senses as soon as possible. She can stay where she is all night, and to-morrow I will put her under the nurse's care."

Meanwhile, Adele in her cell was frantically trying to dash her brains out against the wall.

The padded cushions, however, inflicted no injury, and after while she became calmer.

Utter exhaustion followed, and she fell into a heavy dreamless sleep.

A middle-aged hard-featured woman entered.

She was awakened by the sound of the cell door being opened.

"How do you feel this morning, my dear?" she asked. "You know you were very naughty last night, and bad children must be punished."

The girl looked at her in bewilderment.

"If you are good this morning, and sorry for the way you behaved last night, you shall go back to your own pretty room and have a nice breakfast," the woman went on.

"My own pretty room!" Adele repeated.

"Yes, do you not remember it?"

"Remember it! No. I was only brought here last night, and oh! how cruelly deceived."

As she uttered the words, the girl buried her face in her hands, and burst in a flood of tears.

"Yes, yes," the woman said, "it was cruel of them, to be sure, but when you are in your own nice room again, you will forget all that."

The girl was puzzled at the woman's words, until suddenly a thought struck her.

She started to her feet.

"You think I am mad?" she cried.

"No—no, child!" the woman answered; "you have been sick, that is all. Come now with me, and you shall have a nice breakfast."

The woman spoke as if she were talking to a peevish child. Well the girl realized it was of no use trying to convince her of her sanity. In silence she rose, and followed her out of the cell.

Taking her arm, the woman led her along a corridor, and down a flight of stairs to a lower hall; then, taking a key from her pocket, she opened a door, and led her into the apartment beyond.

The girl looked around her in surprise.

The room was a large one, elegantly furnished; a grand piano stood in one corner, and books and magazines were scattered over the table; everything that was needed for luxurious comfort was there, but there were heavy iron bars across the windows, and every article that by any possibility could be, was fastened securely to the floor or walls.

"Now, you see, I have brought you back to your pretty room again," the woman said. "You must be good after this, and not have to leave it again."

"But I never was here before, and you know it," Adele protested.

"Oh, yes, you were, but you have forgotten. Never mind, you will remember in time."

Adele saw how useless it was to assert her sanity, and was silent; leaving the room the woman soon returned with a dainty breakfast tastefully laid out upon a tray.

Days passed.

How many Adele could not tell; she kept no count of time; a deep and ever-increasing melancholy absorbed all her faculties.

Only one thing was she thankful for, and that was that she was no longer annoyed by the presence of Jason.

But she was to be bereft of even this consolation.

Two nights or more had passed since her entrance to the asylum when the doctor came into the room, and announced there was a visitor for her.

A moment or two later Jason entered the apartment.

She uttered a stifled cry and shrank from him, but without heeding it Jason turned to the doctor.

"Leave us alone," he said.

The doctor obeyed, and Jason advanced to the trembling girl.

"Do you still reject my suit?" he asked.

"Yes," the girl answered firmly.

Jason took a seat.

"Sit down," he said.

The girl obeyed, and the other continued:

"I do not wish to be harsh with you. Whenever I have seemed so it has been your own obstinacy that has caused it. Why will you persist in being so? Become my wife and every luxury the world can afford shall be yours."

"Never," the girl cried. "I will die by my own hand be-

fore I would perjure myself at God's altar by becoming your wife."

Jason uttered an expression of impatience.

"That is mere child's talk," he said. "I have sworn you shall become my wife, and you shall!"

The girl made no answer, and he went on.

"It is not wholly love that makes me wish to make you mine, although I love you as I have never loved before. Listen to me while I propose a bargain to you."

He paused, but Adele making no reply, he asked:

"Are you listening?"

"Yes."

"Then consent to become my wife. We will go to some clergyman and have the ceremony performed. That will be all. I will not so much as offer to kiss you, but will give you money to return at once to your parents. Will you agree to this?"

The girl hesitated; Jason saw that she did so.

"I swear that I will do as I say. Think well over it before you answer."

Adele's hesitation had only been momentary; now in a firm voice she replied:

"Never."

A flash of anger shot from Jason's eyes.

"Then you will never leave this place."

"I care not. Even this death in life is preferable to what you propose."

An evil laugh left Jason's lips.

"Bah! you do not know what you are saying. You have been treated like a queen since you have been here, compared with some of the poor wretches. Listen to that."

As he spoke, from the floor above rang out a chorus of wild unearthly shrieks and screams.

"You will become like them if you persist in your refusal," he went on. "If you are not mad they will make you so. Then cold stone walls, chains, and the wire whip on your naked flesh."

The girl shrank appalled at the horrors thus conjured up before her; had she not known it would have been of no avail she would have gone on her knees to this terrible man, and begged for mercy.

Suddenly through the building and rising even above the frenzied shrieks on the upper floor, rang out the appalling cry:

Fire!

At the same moment Dr. Grabinch came rushing into the room.

"The building is in flames," he cried.

Without making any reply Jason rose and seized Adele in his arms; she strove to free herself from his embrace, but in vain, and then overcome by her excited feelings she fainted.

Hurrying down-stairs and out of the building, Jason placed her in the carriage and was driven to the residence he occupied under the *alias* of Hoffman.

Dismissing the hackman, he carried her into the house and up-stairs to a reception-room, which communicated with his dressing-room.

During the drive Adele had revived, but only to sink into unconsciousness again.

Laying her on a lounge the villain passed into his dressing-room, and through the sliding panel into the secret chamber.

Speaking a few words down the tube communicating with the hotel, he took a vial from one of the shelves and returned to the room where he had left Adele.

She still lay unconscious on the lounge, and pouring several drops of the liquid the vial contained into a glass of water he forced open her teeth and poured it down her throat.

An evil look was on his face as he did so.

"She shall no longer thwart my will," he said. "That draught will make her idiotic long enough for my purpose."

The effects of the draught was almost instantaneous; the girl began to revive and sitting up looked around her with a vacant stare.

"That is right, Adele," he said. "Are you ready to marry me now?"

The girl's hand went to her forehead.

"Marry you?" she repeated.

"Yes. You know you promised me."

"Did I promise you?"

"Yes."

"Then I am ready," she said, wearily. "I do not remember, but I suppose it is all right."

"Of course it is," he answered. "Now lie down and rest until the clergyman comes."

The girl obeyed, and hardly had she done so, than a knock came upon the door.

It was the messenger he had sent for to the hotel.

Hastily writing a few lines he inclosed them in an envelope and gave it to the man, giving him money to pay hack fare, and telling him to lose no time, as it was a matter of life and death.

"Half an hour more," Jason muttered, as the door closed, "and it will be accomplished."

Half an hour passed—three-quarters—an hour.

Jason began to grow impatient.

At last the door-bell rang; a moment or two more and a knock came upon the door, and a matronly looking woman entered.

"Is the clergyman here?" Jason asked.

"Yes; down-stairs."

"Good. You are the girl's aunt—you understand. Her name is Adele Rivers, and she is seventeen years old. Did you bring Julia with you as witness?"

"Yes."

"Very well; bring the minister up here."

The woman descended the stairs, and Jason crossed the room to where Adele lay in the same state of semi-stupor.

Pouring out a glass of wine he gave it to her.

"Drink this," he said; "the clergyman is here, and we are to be married. That lady is your aunt. Remember."

She drank the wine, and instantly a hectic flush overspread her face and throat.

"We are to be married!" she said, curiously.

"Yes."

Even as he spoke, the clergyman, accompanied by the middle-aged woman and a younger one, entered the room.

The wine she had drank, while it did not counteract the effect of the insidious drug Jason had administered to her, caused Adele's eyes to sparkle, and the rich color in her face the clergyman naturally supposed to be the blushes of maiden modesty.

The explanations of Jason and his female accomplice would still further have allayed his suspicions, had he entertained any, and he began the service.

In her state of mental weakness, caused by the deadly drug she had swallowed, the girl was completely under the control of Jason's will, and, with a little prompting from him, uttered the required responses.

At last the sacrilegious ceremony was completed, and nothing remained for the minister to do but pronounce the benediction.

"Those whom God hath joined——" he began, but the sentence was never completed.

Suddenly the door was thrown open, and a stern voice rang through the apartment:

"Stop! I forbid this sacrilege to proceed!"

All turning saw standing in the doorway the figure of Old Stealthy, and in the hall behind him a strong force of police.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

FOR a moment or two all stood literally paralyzed with astonishment at this unexpected interruption.

Jason was the first to recover himself.

A fierce oath came crashing from between his teeth, and he made a spring for the door leading to the dressing-room.

"Halt!" Old Stealthy cried out, sternly, "or I will fire!"

Jason paid no heed to the command, however, and true to his word, the detective pressed the trigger.

A mocking laugh came from the ruffian's lips.

He had reached the dressing-room in safety.

With his still smoking weapon in his hand Old Stealthy sprang after him.

Before he could reach the inner apartment, however, Jason had slid aside the panel and passed into the secret chamber closing the panel after him.

Rapidly the detective passed again into the outer room.

"Place a guard in the dressing-room and let no one leave the house," he said, to the sergeant in command of the police.

Another moment and he had passed down-stairs and into the street.

With the fleetness of the wind he ran on until he reached the Ocean Hotel.

A strong force of police was posted at the entrance.

"Follow me, half a dozen of you," he cried.

As he spoke he entered the hotel, followed by the officers.

Up-stairs he went at full speed until the door of the room in which Jason had received Blackwell Bill was reached.

It was locked, but the combined weight of all the officers thrown against it soon burst it from its hinges.

They rushed into the room.

As they did so they saw Jason stepping through the sliding panel.

A fearful oath left his lips as he saw his retreat thus cut off.

Old Stealthy leveled his revolvers.

"Surrender," he cried, "or I will fire."

Jason uttered a wild, blood-curdling laugh.

"Never!" he cried. "You have run me to earth at last, but I never will surrender alive, and you shall all bear me company to Hades."

As he spoke, he raised his right hand, which held a small package.

Like a flash, Old Stealthy realized his desperate design.

The package contained dynamite.

"Back!" he shouted to his companions.

At the same moment he pressed the trigger of his revolver.

The report of the weapon and a cry of mortal agony were blended.

Then almost instantly followed a terrific explosion.

All were thrown to the floor insensible, and more than one of them were killed.

Beyond a few bruises Old Stealthy was uninjured.

As he sprang backwards, he had thrown himself to the floor, and the dynamite having exploded behind the paneling, none of the flying fragments had struck him.

As for Jason, nothing but some mangled portions of his body could be found. A horrible death had been the end of his guilty life.

Within a quarter of an hour Old Stealthy was on his feet again, and back to the house where Jason had lived under his alias of Hoffman.

By this time the pernicious drug she had swallowed had taken full effect, and Adele was in a state of stupor.

He at once had a physician summoned, who applied restoratives, and in a short time she began to grow better.

Meanwhile the accomplices of Jason, in his attempted crime, had been taken into custody.

As soon as she was at all able to be moved the detective had Adele placed in a carriage and accompanied her once more to the house of Mrs. Fraser.

The lady was made aware for the first time of the deception that had been practiced upon her; she was, however, overjoyed at the poor girl's escape from her enemies, and willingly consented to take her under her care until her parents should arrive.

Old Stealthy took his departure, satisfied she was in good hands.

The fortnight that followed was a busy one for him.

From his own discoveries and the revelations made by Blackwell Bill he was able to extirpate a criminal league of whose strength and numbers he had never dreamed.

Jason had been the head of it; when alive his undoubted though debased intellectual power had been able to keep the working of its organization almost perfect. In almost every large eastern city it had an agent who was always on hand to keep its members posted.

All these agents were arrested and held to await their trials.

Jacobs, the pretended picture dealer in whose house Adele had been kept a prisoner, was taken into custody, as were also Celeste and her companion Clarisse.

The plate of the five-dollar counterfeit, as also that of the new twenty were found in the secret chamber that had been Jason's workshop, and destroyed.

All who were in any way connected with the nefarious league were arrested, to in due time receive adequate sentences in the court.

Blackwell Bill received his promised reward, but it done him no good, for the night before the steamer, on which he had taken passage for Australia sailed, he was stabbed in a drunken row.

As has been said, it was a fortnight before all the arrests were made; with them the detective's share of the work ended, as there was plenty of evidence to convict them forthcoming without his being needed. He made request for a vacation which was willingly granted.

By this time Adele's parents had received her letter, and hastened to New York. Their joy at again clasping in their arms the daughter they had mourned as dead, may be better imagined than described.

Adele was still very ill from the effects of the drug she had swallowed, but the arrival of her parents did more for her than any medicine would have done, and in a few days more she was convalescent.

One day Mrs. Fraser entered the room where she and her mother were seated.

"There is a gentleman in the reception-room who wishes to see you, Adele," she said.

In an instant the question left Adele's lips:

"Old Stealthy?"

"Yes."

"I am so glad," Adele cried. "Come, mamma; you must also thank him."

Mother and daughter accompanied Mrs. Fraser to the reception-room.

As they entered it Adele looked at Mrs. Fraser in surprise.

The only occupant of the room was a young man dressed in the height of fashion—a handsome young man, too, with a quizzical expression in his dark gray eyes.

"Let me introduce you to my nephew, Mr. Fred Raymond," Mrs. Fraser said.

Both Mrs. Rivers and her daughter acknowledged the introduction, and then Adele said:

"I thought you said, Mrs. Fraser, that Old Stealthy was here?"

"So I did," was the reply. "This gentleman is Old Stealthy."

Adele's astonishment could find no utterance in words for a few moments.

"Is it possible?" she said at length.

It was possible, and she found that the detective could be as great a success in a social way as he was professionally.

A week or two had yet to elapse before Adele would be strong enough to undertake the journey to her western home, and during that time Fred Raymond became a constant visitor at the house.

Need any more be said?

Given a tender, loving girl and a handsome young man who had more than once saved her life, and whom she had every reason to regard as a hero, cannot the readers easily imagine the result.

If they cannot, the writer will mention that the wedding is fixed to take place early in the coming autumn.

Whether after his marriage Fred Raymond will resume his profession, or accept the position his prospective father-in-law has offered him as manager of his vast mining business, is for the future to decide; but whether he does or not one thing is certain, that in the records and traditions of the secret service a name that will not soon be forgotten is that of OLD STEALTHY.

[THE END.]

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